

International Journal of Role-Playing

The aim of The International Journal of Role-Playing is to act as a hybrid knowledge network, and bring together the varied interests in role-playing and the associated knowledge networks, e.g. academic research, the games and creative industries, the arts and the strong role-playing communities.

Editorial

The International Journal of Role-Playing is a response to a growing need for a place where the varied and wonderful fields of role-playing research and -development, covering academia, the industry and the arts, can exchange knowledge and research, form networks and communicate.

J. Tuomas Harviainen
Editorial Board IJRP

2

Creativity Rules. How rules impact player creativity in three tabletop role-playing games

This article sheds light on how different rules systems for tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) impact players' sense of creativity. It uses interviews and group discussions to make the players reflect on how they are influenced by rules of their game.

Karl Bergström
The Interactive Institute
Sweden

4-17

An Embodied Cognition Approach for Understanding Role-playing

The article proposes that the theories of grounded cognition and embodiment can be utilized in explaining the role-playing experience.

Petri Lankoski
Södertörn University
Sweden

Simo Järvelä
Aalto University
Finland

18-32

A tale of two cities: Symbolic capital and larp community formation in Canada and Sweden

The purpose of this article is to locate common authoritative symbols in the larp presentations from two cities, and use Bourdieu's theory to identify central norms in the material and how they can be significant as a homogenizing force within a larp community.

Mikael Hellstrom
University of Alberta
Canada 33-48

The self-perceived effects of the role-playing hobby on personal development - a survey report

This article is a survey report of a study conducted between 2010 and 2011 exploring the views of role-playing gamers on how the role-playing hobby has influenced their social and mental development.

Mikko Meriläinen
University of Helsinki
Finland

49-68

Editorial

The State of Our Art

Welcome to issue three of the International Journal of Role-Playing.

The year and a half since the publication of issue two has both seen incredible formal advancements within the study of role-playing as well as witnessed several cases of people trying to reinvent the proverbial wheel, or to improve it while not actually acknowledging its existence. What has, however, set this season apart from earlier ones is that even the latter category has produced some very remarkable works, which while seemingly ignorant, dismissive, or both, of existing key research, add in certain parts something very significant to our shared pool of knowledge. Jon Peterson, for example, in his magazine analysis based *Playing at the World* (2012), chronicles to incredible, unprecedented detail the early days of how *Dungeons & Dragons* came to be. The essays of *Dungeons & Dragons and Philosophy* (Cogburn & Silcox, eds., 2012), in turn, illustrate many wonderful facets of looking at role-playing phenomena as philosophical issues, in a light and playful tone that I hope will guide new readers to also the philosophical articles in the issues this journal.

Three major events have especially shown a change - a fulfilment of sorts - on role-playing research. The first of these is, in my opinion, the professionalization of our scholarship. We have seen plenty of academic publications about role-playing, or at least a nice, solid few, but things have in general been an uphill battle about credibility towards both the academic community and many role-players themselves. One key measure of proper scholarship in a young field is whether it is able to produce works that can be appreciated also by the standards of the academic community outside itself, works in which the practitioners nevertheless still recognize themselves. I believe that point has now been passed.

In addition to the handful of earlier doctoral works, the time between issues 2 and 3 has seen no less than four new doctoral dissertations that directly study role-playing: Marie Denward, in *Pretend that it is real!* (2011), studied media convergence in the Emmy-awarded larp / ARG / television hybrid *Sanningen om Marika*. Karl Bergstrom (2012) wrote on how games - especially role-playing games - can promote a sense of togetherness. His article on the rules of tabletop role-playing games in this issue, *Creativity rules*, was by special permission included in that very thesis before its current publication in IJRP. In my own doctoral dissertation (Harviainen 2012), I studied physical role-playing environments as social information systems, and our previous editor, Markus Montola, wrote his (2012) on especially the methodological aspects of studying and understanding role-playing and pervasive games - the very core questions of this very journal.

In a way as remarkably, the time period also witnessed an influx of refereed role-playing articles in much older journals, such as *Simulation & Gaming*, a role-playing seminar at the University of Tampere (the cherrypicked papers of which will form an upcoming issue of this journal) and a larp-as-art course at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Documentation has also become increasingly active. Journalist Lizzie Stark (2012) wrote a book about her journey through both the North American and the Nordic larp scenes, providing a seminal perspective on what is taking place in both the theory and practice of several live-action role-playing cultures. Out of a Northeast Modern Language Association conference track arose a diverse book about one of the most debated concepts of game studies, immersion (Torner & White, eds., 2012). *The Book of Kapo* (Raasted, ed., 2012) demonstrated a new, holistic style of role-playing documentation, and *Playing the Learning Game* (Andresen, ed., 2012) showed how actual

experiences can be used to teach the creation of new educational role-playing games. All of these works combined a practicality with a tradition of precision, to build something that would be even academically useful, yet directly applicable to the field as well.

Simultaneously to its maturation, role-playing scholarship still in many ways stays true to its grassroots origins. The great majority of its now-accredited scholars - both hobbyists and professionals - perform their research not from outside role-playing, but as practitioners themselves. Whereas in some fields that might be a possible point of suspicion, the ephemeral nature of role-playing makes it often quite necessary to be a part of the first-person audience, i.e. to play the game as one of its participants.

In this issue, five authors, through four articles, further enrich our knowledge on role-playing. In *Creativity Rules*, Karl Bergström examines the impact of game rules on player creativity in tabletop role-playing. Mikael Hellstrom has studied the larp cultures of two cities, one in Sweden and one in Canada, and their differences in the formation of symbolic capital. Simo Järvelä and Petri Lankoski write on player, character and the impact of embodied cognition on the relationship. Mikko Meriläinen, based on two surveys, describes the self-reported personality development of role-players, comparing those to a control group. Together, these texts form a journey from the beginning of game experiences to the way they are experienced and utilized both at once and at much later points of life.

On behalf of the editorial board, the reviewers and the authors, I proudly bid you welcome to the third issue of the International Journal of Role-Playing.

J. Tuomas Harviainen

REFERENCES

- (1) Andresen, M. E. (ed.), 2012. *Playing the Learning Game. A Practical Introduction to Educational Roleplaying*. Oslo: Fantasiforbundet & Education Centre POST.
- (2) Bergström, K., 2012. *Playing for Togetherness. Designing for Interaction Rituals through Gaming*. Doctoral dissertation, Chalmers University of Technology & University of Gothenburg.
- (3) Coghurn, J. & Silcox, M (eds.), 2012. *Dungeons & Dragons & Philosophy. Raiding the Temple of Wisdom*. Chicago: Open Court.
- (4) Denward, M., 2011. *Pretend that it is Real!: Convergence Culture in Practice*. Doctoral dissertation, Malmö University.
- (5) Harviainen, J. T., 2012. *Systemic Perspectives on Information in Physically Performed Role-play*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Tampere.
- (6) Montola, M., 2012. *On the Edge of the Magic Circle. Understanding Role-Playing and Pervasive Games*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Tampere.
- (7) Peterson, J., 2012. *Playing at the World. A History of Simulating Wars, People and Fantastic Adventures from Chess to Role-playing Games*. San Diego: Unreason Press.
- (8) Raasted, C. (ed.) 2012. *The Book of Kapo: Documenting a Larp project about Dehumanization and Life in Camps*. Copenhagen: Rollespilsakademiet.
- (9) Stark, L., 2012. *Leaving Mundania. Inside the Transformative World of Live Action Role-Playing Games*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
- (10) Torner, E. & White, W. J. (eds.), 2012. *Immersive Gameplay: Essays on Participatory Media and Role-Playing*. Jefferson: McFarland.

EDITORIAL BOARD

- ▶ Richard Bartle, University of Essex, United Kingdom
- ▶ Marinka Copier, Utrecht School of the Arts, The Netherlands
- ▶ Anders Drachen, IT University, Denmark
- ▶ Gary Alan Fine, Northwestern University, USA
- ▶ John Kim, USA
- ▶ Kurt Lancaster, Fort Lewis College, USA
- ▶ Craig Lindley, Gotland University College, Sweden
- ▶ Markus Montola, University of Tampere, Finland
- ▶ Jessica Mulligan, USA
- ▶ Monte Singman, Shanghai Theatre Academy, China
- ▶ J. Tuomas Harviainen, University of Tampere, Finland

Creativity Rules

How rules impact player creativity in three tabletop

Popular abstract - This article sheds light on how different rules systems for tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) impact players' sense of creativity. It looks at three very different games played by six role-playing ensembles, and uses interviews and group discussions to make the players reflect on how they are influenced by the rules used during play. While the sometimes insular nature of TRPG gaming became evident, it was also clear that there are several different phenomena that occur in a TRPG that can be labeled as "creative". Aiming to provide a tool for discussion on TRPGs, six different types of creativity is outlined in the article, as well as a number of different examples of the role that the rules play in influencing these.

General Terms: Design, Human Factors, Theory.

Keywords: Tabletop role-playing, rules systems, creativity.

Karl Bergström
The Interactive Institute
Sweden
karlb@tii.se

1. INTRODUCTION

The tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) as we know it appeared in the world of gaming sometime in the seventies, initially as an off-shoot of war games in a fantasy setting, where each player would command only a single character instead of a unit of troops (Fine, 1983, Mackay, 2001). While inexorably linked to gaming in a more board-game sense for the first few years, it soon became apparent that TRPGs held much wider potential in its capacity to serve as a modern day vessel for storytelling. The TRPG brought rules that regulated the activity, and a more systematic focus on co-creation and participation. There is currently a plethora of TRPG systems and settings available, both commercially (Schick, 1991 list well over a hundred, and there has been many more since) and under a creative commons license (e.g. Boyle and Cross, 2009).

One of the problems of TRPGs is that the genre suffers when it comes to expressing what makes a game good, just like games in general (Lundgren, Bergström and Björk, 2009). Opinions differ greatly,

and many role-players have deep-seated prejudices towards the way other role-players play, or the systems that they use; added to this is the often insular nature of the TRPG community (a sentiment echoed by Hendricks, 2006).

One of the problems of TRPGs is that the genre suffers when it comes to expressing what makes a game good ...

Even if members come and go, the player groups are often rather solid, and players seem to seldom discuss their play in depth with others, something which is possibly linked to the earlier stigma associated with TRPGs (Bowman, 2010). Even if the internet created forums for debate, far from every role-player takes part in the debate, and it seems there is a lack of a common language of expression. Likely, this hampers the development of TRPGs and the creation of theories on the activity – Greg Costikyan (1994) lamented this very fact as applied to the wider field of games in his *I Have No Words & I Must Design*.

Comparing with live-action role play (LARP), where larger player groups (often in the hundreds, compared to the 5-6 participants in a TRPG group) contributes to a less insular community, one finds that the debate, both scholarly and otherwise is a lot more open and accessible. As an example, the yearly Nordic conference "Knutepunkt" has published books on LARP theory and practice since Gade, Thorup and Sander (2003) and draws an international crowd. There is nothing similar in the TRPG community – despite several conventions no comparable culture of meta-discussion has developed. *The Interactive Fantasy* (Rilstone, 1994) journal was an early attempt at developing a discourse on role-playing, but only lasted four issues.

Comparing with live-action role play (LARP), where larger player groups (often in the hundreds, compared to the 5-6 participants in a TRPG group) necessarily contributes to a less insular community, one finds that the debate, both scholarly and otherwise is a lot more open and accessible.

Since TRPG players often state that a sense of creativity is central to their experience (Fine, 1983, Bowman, 2010) and that some type of rules system is inherent in all TRPGs (Montola, 2009), looking at how rules impact the players' sense of creativity could be a fruitful starting point for looking at why some perceive a specific system as good, and some do not.

The purpose of this article is to examine how three different rules systems, chosen for breadth, impact the perceived creativity of the players. "Perceived" since no formal or quantitative measure of creativity will be used, (such as Carson, Peterson and Higgins, 2005) because no such measure exists for TRPGs, and translated existing measures would probably lend themselves poorly to their evaluation.

Although there are plenty of other formalized systems available for the co-creation of stories, such as *Once Upon a Time* (Lambert, Rilstone and Wallis, 1995) or *Universalis* (Holmes and Mazza, 2002), TRPGs were chosen because player groups tend to play the same game extensively, and with some solidity when it comes to the people they play with, making systematic study easier.

With all the talk of games and systems, it is easy to view this as a "game-centered" article (Björk introduced the delineation of game studies into the study of games, gamers and gaming in a 2008 article), but this would be a mistake. At heart, it is primarily focused on the players of TRPGs ("players" is used rather than "gamers" in this article, since a TRPG is not strictly a traditional game and the term "gamer" more frequently conjures up images of someone who plays digital games) and their creativity, here expressed through the respondents of the study.

2. BACKGROUND

In a summary of creativity research, Michael Mumford (2003) claims that there is general agreement that creativity involves the production of "novel, useful products", but applied to TRPGs, this definition is inherently problematic. TRPG players do not produce products, but the creative aspects of role-playing are hard to deny. You can also debate the nature of "usefulness"; the fruit of a role-player's creative endeavor is not, as with a writer or composer, a book or a song, but rather something altogether ephemeral, existing only as it is being made, and afterwards mainly in the minds of the participants, save for notes and/or props. In this, it is more similar to a performance of improvisational jazz.

This study will not delve into the debate on the nature of creativity at length (see e.g. Kaufmann and Sternberg, 2010), but rather establish that for the purposes of this work, it is the player's own experience of creativity that is in focus.

Fine (1983) who wrote about the then-budding hobby using anthropological methods in the 1970s was first out, but besides him tabletop role-playing was previously a distressingly under-researched subject. Since then, researchers Mackay (2001) (role-playing as performing art), Cover (2010) (how narrative is created in TRPGs), Bowman (2010) (benefits of role-playing) and Tresca (2011) (how role-playing games have evolved over the years) have looked at various aspects of TRPGs. Tychsen et al (2007) has made a fruitful comparison between the tabletop and digital varieties of role-playing – finding that although the subject matter is similar, there are fundamental differences, the presence of actual role-playing being one.

When it comes to the rules of role-playing games, Montola (2009) navigates the difficult waters of the role-playing process and outlines three key

components: an imaginary game world, a power structure and personified characters. He also points out that the rules of TRPGs are significantly different from those of e.g. board games as described in e.g. Salen & Zimmermans *Rules of Play* (2004).

LeBlanc (2006) introduced the mechanics-dynamics-aesthetics model, which shows how the rules of a game (the mechanics) influence the experience of a game (the aesthetics) through the behavior of the game that emerges from the rules (the dynamics). Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek (2004) also introduced eight types of aesthetics in order to create a more “directed vocabulary” for describing the players’ experiences of a game.

Using LeBlancs model, Lundgren, Bergström and Björk (2009) presented the idea of “aesthetical gameplay ideals”; specific concentrations of gameplay design patterns (Björk and Holopainen, 2005) showing how one could describe the aesthetics of a game through its mechanics and dynamics. Although limiting themselves to board- and computer games, these ideas should also be applicable to TRPGs, albeit with a slightly different methodology.

In an early attempt to do something similar for tabletop role-playing, Edwards (2001) put forth the “GNS-model” which has since gained some traction in parts of the TRPG community. It presents three different “creative agendas” – the “gamist” style, concerned with competition; “narrativist” style, concerned with the creation of a good story; and “simulationist” style, concerned with the accurate simulation of a diegesis. The GNS-model has been the subject of much debate since its initial inception and is part of a larger corpus of role-playing theory called “Forge” theory (a useful summary of which can be found in Boss, 2008).

3. METHOD

Rather than studying the game artifact solely as in Lundgren, Bergström and Björk (2009), it was felt that a similar study of TRPGs also demanded user data. TRPGs are much more concerned with players’ creativity and have (almost) limitless possibilities compared to board- and computer games. However, in order to focus the discussion and provide a similar frame of reference, three specific game systems were chosen for analysis.

The three systems chosen were *Dungeons & Dragons*, both in its 3.5 (Cook, Tweet and Williams, 2003) and Pathfinder (Bulmahn, 2009) incarnations, *World of Darkness* later edition (Bridges, Chillot, Cliffe and Lee, 2004), and *Legends of Anglerre* (Newton and Birch, 2010). Additionally, the participants were encouraged to comment and compare with other systems if applicable.

Six player groups were picked, with every group having at least extensive experience with one game system and moderate familiarity with another, but often considerably more. All groups were also at least presented with the third game, if they had no previous experience with it. Every game had two groups for which that game was their main experience. Note however that “extensive experience” is not necessarily the same for all three systems; as some have been around longer, players are naturally more experienced with them. The player groups were far from homogenous, with different members having markedly diverse levels of experience with TRPGs, from a couple of years to more than twenty-five years, with the median around 10-15 years. Several reported that they had two “blocks” of TRPG experience, one from when they were younger, and one from when they “rediscovered” the hobby later in life. They all played in other TRPG groups than these from time to time, and were familiar with several other systems. The respondents were of mixed ages, from early twenties to late thirties, and while there was an overrepresentation of males, the gender composition was probably at least comparable the hobby at large. The groups did not stay completely fixed throughout, and three players appeared in more than one group. All in all, about twenty-five people contributed data to the study in this stage.

Several different data collection methods were utilized; interviews with select participants (interviewing all participants would not have been feasible given time, resource and access constraints), participatory observation and observation by the researcher - TRPG researchers Fine (1983), Mackay (2001), Cover (2010), Bowman (2010) and Tresca (2011) all use similar methods, but Fine is the earliest and speaks most about methodology. The most prolific data source was however group discussions, both within the selected groups, and at two occasions between groups when members from several groups gathered.

The interviews and some of the group discussions were more formal, structured affairs compared to the other data collection, but still loose enough to encourage reflection and free association on the subject, very much in the vein of Thomsson (2002). This also meant that the respondents were presented with the work in progress, what others had said before them and invited to take part in the analysis.

This also meant that the respondents were presented with the work in progress, what others had said before them and invited to take part in the analysis.

For the interviews and formal group discussions, participant consent was secured beforehand, but for most of the other data collection consent was only secured *post-hoc*. What might have been a serious breach of researcher etiquette in a more sensitive field was considered unproblematic given the subject matter. No participant had any problems with this, and no-one refused participation. No recordings were made, but extensive notes were taken. The respondents were asked specifically if the anonymization standard on their quotes could be relaxed somewhat, so as to be able to include group-specific rulings, sayings, etc. and everyone agreed.

When the study was almost done, the analysis and findings was presented to another, separate group of TRPG players with at least considerable experience to provide greater external validity. They had the opportunity to ask for clarifications, point out errors/ findings that did not concur with their understanding. This because the six groups showed remarkable diversity – further emphasizing the point made in the introduction; while this provided the study with rich data, it also raised questions on the reliability of the study, despite the fact that the participants often were in agreement.

The study has two main limitations; the geographically limited sample (Nordic participants only) and the possibility of confounding variables.

While there is no systematic study published on the differences between role-players from different countries, the players themselves maintain that there are many differences, mainly when it comes

to the role of the rules. This is however a one-sided assessment since no foreign players has been asked, and in any case it is unlikely that they would have developed opinions on Nordic players. Given the amounts of prejudice generally displayed by role-players (Fine (1989) also reports on this, some twenty-five years earlier) it is probably safe to say that these views are fraught with bias. Nevertheless, this does not mean that concerns over significant geographical differences can be discarded outright. If we turn to the sibling LARP community, there is at least one published work that purport to highlight the differences of “Nordic-style” LARP, entitled simply Nordic LARP (Stenros and Montola, 2010). Further research in the same vein on other samples will hopefully shed light on whether the differences are significant, or if the findings in this study are generalizable to the larger TRPG community. A randomized international sample of TRPG players and e.g. a questionnaire study would also suffice, but is hardly feasible due to resource and access constraints, not to mention the loss of depth/ detail that a questionnaire would entail.

The greatest risk of confounding in the study comes from the fact that TRPG games comes with more than rules. There is also setting (sometimes published separately from the rules, see e.g. *GURPS* (Jackson, 1996)) - the diegetic world in which the game takes place, as well as presentation, illustrations, layout etc. of the game. Either of these has the potential to significantly influence player creativity, confounding the relation between the rules system and player creativity. Throughout the interviews and groups discussions the participants were asked to focus on the role of the rules and not the setting of the games, and this was kept in mind during the study.

In addition to the limitations mentioned above, there is also the constant risk of bias introduced by dissimilar respondents, when it comes to e.g. eloquence. Some respondents are naturally much more interested in the topic than others, and some reported a marked disinterest in the rules system altogether. Although this is a risk one runs with almost all interview studies (see e.g. Kvale, 1997) it is mentioned here because the effect might have been somewhat more present.

The results of the study are presented below, first a description of the three systems and player commentaries on them, then a section on the different role of rules, and on different kinds of creativity. The games are described with a short

paragraph on setting and type of game, the traits of a character and other notable rules features. All quotes are translated from the native Swedish, edited for brevity and readability, and anonymised.

4. THE GAMES

The three systems were chosen on the basis of breadth – they represent somewhat radically different approaches to tabletop role-playing – their status as "established" TRPG systems and researcher access to player groups. While some of the more "niche" rules systems (e.g. Czege, 2003) probably could have provided even more breadth, it is in the naturally the case with more obscure games that fewer people play them, thus making it difficult to locate a satisfying sample.

4.1 Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 / Pathfinder

Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) remains a classic tabletop role playing game years after its initial launch in 1974 (Gygax and Arneson, 1974). In many ways it is the "grand old lady" of TRPGs, and is currently in its fourth edition (Collins et al, 2008). In this study it is the earlier 3.5 edition (Cook, Tweet and Williams, 2003) and the later development of Pathfinder (Bulmahn, 2009) that is the object of study, since these are the versions the respondents had familiarity with. For the purposes of this article, the two are considered as the same system. Of the three systems, this is probably the most rules-heavy.

The settings were Eberron (Baker, Slavicsek and Wyatt, 2004) and the Pathfinder setting (Jacobs, 2011); these are more or less classical fantasy settings in which the players portray bold adventurers seeking treasure and experience. Gameplay generally revolves around slaying monsters, overcoming adversaries and fulfilling quests, revolving heavily around armed conflict. As characters progress, they earn experience which grants them additional capabilities.

The D&D character has several components – race, class, attributes, skills, feats, gear, spells if applicable, and sometimes other special abilities; but most important is "level", a general measure of the characters advancement derived from amassed experience. There is also a host of other statistics such as armor class, saves and movement speed derived from the above components. Race (e.g. human, dwarf, elf) gives modifications to attributes and sometimes other abilities (such as low-light

vision); class (fighter, ranger, monk, etc.) describes roughly what your character does in the group, but this is not set in stone.

"Generally, the fighter fights in close combat, the 'caster [someone who has access to and can cast spells] stays back and provides support, the rouge sneaks and so on, but part of the fun is to challenge these things and play with the roles."

Most traits are chosen by the player for his or her character, with the exception of attributes which are sometimes rolled for randomly.

*"In all honesty, despite those that claim otherwise, this game is geared towards combat. Sure not *only* combat, but I have never been in a game that hasn't had plenty of it. That's not necessarily bad, though, it's just that it's more like an action movie than a drama. The game is complicated for a reason; you're supposed to be able to explore the mechanics of the game when you play."*

"For me, this game is completely unfathomable; the [D&D] rules are the very anathema of creativity and role-playing. There is so much to keep track of, so much flipping through a heap of rules books and you are constantly penalized if you don't know the rules, so you're not encouraged to experiment at all."

As is evident from the sentiments above, the respondents were mixed on the merits of the D&D rules. Some pointed at the creativity inherent in using the rules, others felt that the many rules stifled and dampened their creative expression. It was also evident from the respondents that a system such as this required all participants to know the rules to a much greater degree than in other systems, where only the GM (Game Master / Moderator) might have a firm grasp of the system.

4.2 World of Darkness (new edition, diceless)

The "world of darkness" (WoD) came into being in 1998 with the launch of the first edition of *Vampire the Masquerade* (Achilli et al, 1998). Since then several different games have been published that have compatible rules and are set in the same world, allowing characters from the different games to be present in the same group. In 2004 the game was rebooted and a core rulebook for the "new world of darkness" (nWoD) was introduced (Bridges et al, 2004). The system generally uses dice, but can also be played diceless, as it was in this case. The rules are designed to be fast and

comparatively easy to learn, but it is by no means rules-light.

The WoD setting is a sort of “shadow-version” of contemporary earth, where supernatural beings such as vampires and werewolves prowl the night. The genre is called “gothic-punk” and attempts to deal with more mature themes. The players can portray any number of supernatural creatures, or normal humans, and gameplay usually explores themes of personal horror – the sense that you are losing what makes you human and degenerating into the unknown.

The nWoD consolidated the rules, even if the rules of the earlier games were already pretty similar. Characters have attributes, abilities, merits, (sometimes) supernatural abilities and a morality trait.

In this case, the players used the same system but dispensed with the rolling of dice, instead allowing the game master (in WoD called the “storyteller”) to judge based on the characters score and the interest of the story. The players could spend willpower points to increase their score. In one of the groups the players also had “drama points”, inspired by games such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* RPG (Brannan et al, 2002), with which they could influence the story and resurrect their characters. Similar systems nowadays exist in numerous TRPGs, such as “perversity points” in *Paranoia* (Varney, 2004) and fate points in *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* (Pramas, 1986) or *Dark Heresy* (Barnes, Flack and Mason, 2008).

“We want things to go as fast as possible and wouldn't let a bad dice roll get in the way of a good story. The ‘dots’ [WoD stats are often called dots because of how they are depicted in the rulebook] simply illustrate what your character is good at and is used in a purely descriptive sense.”

“I like dice. They provide uncertainty, dispel some of the arbitrariness that would otherwise occur, and allows for a much more dynamic story to ‘grow’ from the interactions between the players; the random results also forces you to be creative in new and unexpected ways.”

The respondents were again of different minds on the use of dice; while some abhorred it and some felt it “almost necessary”, some occupied a more moderate middle ground.

4.3 Legends of Anglerre

Legends of Anglerre (LoA) (Newton and Birch, 2010) is the fantasy version of the popular *Starblazer Adventures* (Birch, Donachie, Newman and Nicol, 2008) role-playing game, and uses the FATE (Donoghue and Hicks, 2003) system. It is meant to be rules-light, streamlined, and to encourage a narrative style of play.

The rules can be used with a number of settings (two examples are included in the product); one of the groups had created their own generic fantasy world before play, the other created theirs “on the fly” during play, changing the setting every couple of games.

A LoA character is defined by his or her skills, stunts and aspects. Aspects are short sentences that describe the character and that can be brought into play through the use of “fate points”, that are gained if the aspect is negative (in a given situation) for one's character, and spent if it is positive.

“Let's say my character has the aspect ‘light sleeper’. If I need to roll in order to wake up when someone sneaks into my room, I can spend a point and get a bonus, but if there is lots of noise during the night, perhaps I don't get much sleep at all and wake fatigued; then I would get a point instead.”

Fate points also serve the same function as the drama points mentioned earlier, allowing the players to affect the story directly through their expenditure.

“If I come up with something that my character could do something really cool with if it was in the story, then the GM might allow me to spend a point, and it is there. Or maybe I forgot to state something important earlier, then maybe I can spend a point and I didn't.”

LoA is a game with few rules, and those that are all work more or less in the same way.

4.4 On house rules and group adaptations

None of the groups ran their game exactly as the rules were written, instead substituting unwanted rules with their own interpretations, removing superfluous rules (seldom explicitly, more often they would just not use them) and making additions, often taken from other systems, such as the drama point example above. While this might seem to make it more difficult to evaluate a given rules system it is not necessarily so. These are often minor alterations and adaptations, fully

comparable to the house rules and other agreements that occur when playing other types of games, such as board games (Bergström, 2010). Adapting the rules can also be seen as a creative pursuit, see below.

5. THE ROLE OF RULES

Presented here are a number of different roles that the rules play for the creative process during the game. They emerged during the interviews and later solidified during the discussions.

5.1 The rules as "narration first" or "rules first"

An important difference between the rules systems was the distinction between "rules first" and "narration first" systems. In a narration first system (WoD) the player would narrate the actions of their character first, and the rules interpretation would come afterwards, in a rules first system (D&D, LoA) the mechanics precede the narration.

"Oh, this one is a little bit complicated – with rules first it's like no matter what I do, the rules stay the same, so I have enormous freedom. All magical ranged attacks in LoA are the same, so I can describe it in whatever way I like; freezing blasts, Darth Vader style choking, or whatever. With narration first I have to be more careful, but on the other hand, what I say matters more, 'cause if I do something smart, for example, that will be reflected in how the rules resolve the action."

"These are two completely different narration styles, and I can't honestly say that I prefer one over the other; one is good if you want a colorful story, the other if you want to be more problem-solving creative, so to speak."

"With narration first I have to be more careful, but on the other hand, what I say matters more, 'cause if I do something smart, for example, that will be reflected in how the rules resolve the action."

5.2 The rules as arbitrator

Tabletop role-playing is a collaborative, co-creation effort, but as in all groups that do something together, different opinions sometimes clash. Two players can have a different view of what makes an interesting story, or what would be possible for a

character, for example. While the GM usually fulfills the arbitrator role, the rules also carry this capacity, and are often viewed as more impartial. Often used in player vs. player conflicts. In this way, the rules can function as an arbitrator of player creativity, helping to ensure equality between the players. However, the rules often fail in this regard according to the respondents.

"Of course it happens that two people are of a different mind on what should happen, and the GM might not be able to resolve it. Then we might go 'let's ask the dice, shall we?' and in effect, the rules decide."

White (2009) has a good example of this: "[13-23] shows the GM reframing his diegetic attempt game-mechanically rather than narratively..." (p. 179), where the GM uses the rules to arbitrate.

5.3 The rules as creative coolant

While a very open system might engender free and open narration, this can sometimes become too boundless, and in this case the rules system can act as a "coolant" that prevents the narrative from becoming too fantastic. The three systems in the study were cited as placed more or less on a scale, with D&D as most coolant, nWoD in between, and LoA least. The respondents seem to indicate that there is a difference between creative quantity and creative quality, but that the relation between the two is far from straightforward. Note that a story can be fantastic, but still internally consistent, which differs this role from the one below.

"When we play a more open, free form game where the rules basically don't restrict you at all, the narration often becomes very fantastic and far-fetched. This is fun now and then, but seldom produces the more tight, believable stories. The rules 'bound the sandbox' so to speak, and makes sure the sand doesn't go everywhere".

5.4 The rules as consistency-provider

Diegetic consistency is an issue in both TRPGs and other narratives, such as books and movies, but where someone might review the script of a movie and spot inaccuracies, TRPGs lack the presence of a script. Rules can often provide some consistency, a stable, quantifiable point in the diegesis that change in more or less pre-set ways, that the players can come back to and make sure that consistency is maintained; or to quote one respondent, "at least isn't completely out the window".

"Sometimes people smirk at the notion of realism in obviously fantastic settings, but what they don't release is that it isn't about realism, it is about internal consistency and that that the world makes sense 'in that world' so to speak."

5.5 The rules as inspiration

Many rules-set, include several different options for creating your character, pre-selected skills and other abilities. The systems in this study are no different, and are quite rich with examples and possibilities. Along with the game's setting, these can also provide inspiration, both for characters and for stories, which the players might not have thought about otherwise.

"It's sometimes hard to say where the setting ends and the rules begin, in some cases they are inextricably linked. They can provide great inspiration towards what the game is really about, so to speak, and gives a sort of 'easy access' to the setting."

5.6 The rules as support

While all players are equal on paper (there are no handicapping rules in TRPGs) the players often differ in levels of experience with the game (both rules and setting) and creative ability. The rules can serve as support for inexperienced players and show what you can do and not, what the chances of success for a particular action might be, and as was mentioned by the respondent above, allow access to the setting.

"Say what you want about D&D, but it is a gem for beginners if they play with someone who really knows the game. Your options are all laid out for you, but there is still depth as you level up. Combat is simple, and the rules regulate everything, so there is no need to feel like you don't 'get it'. Sure, a good player gets more done, but it's not the same as if you have a more abstract system"

"For someone who isn't as into the geek stuff as us, the rules help level the playing field, so to speak, and I know this might seem like a paradox, but it really isn't"

According to the respondents, it is very different to not know the rules, and knowing them but not being good at using them, the former leading to much more trouble as players "freeze up" when they become uncertain.

5.7 The rules as communication

The rules system, particularly the numbers on different traits, serves an important communicative purpose during the game. While verbal descriptions usually suffice, putting numbers on abstract concepts can ease communication and make sure that there is a greater similarity of understanding in the group. By using the rules when communicating, skilled role-players can distribute creativity in the group, without sacrificing consistency.

"I'll give you an example - if my character receives damage, for example, I want to know more exactly how damaged, but this can be hard to describe exactly in words. If the game master can put a number to it instead, I can interpret the numbers and play from there."

5.8 The rules as randomness

Only two of the systems in the study had randomness (the WoD system has randomness as written, but this was removed by the player group) and while undesired results can disrupt the activity as a whole, everyone agrees that it also can serve as a potent source of new creative angles. Whether it is a failed roll when overcoming an obstacle, or a roll on a random encounter table, the dice (dice provides the randomness in almost all TRPGs) have the potential to surprise the entire group, including the GM.

"Randomness makes the story more organic, more uncertain. You never know exactly what will happen and often the unexpected occurs, forcing you to think in new ways. Without randomness you are safer, and you can be more long-term, so to speak. Both ways have their merits."

5.9 The rules as diegetic control (distribution) mechanism

Diegetic control¹ and the distribution thereof can be a sensitive thing when playing TRPGs, and it has a direct and obvious effect on player creativity. It refers to who has the power to decide what is true or not in the game diegesis, that is, the alternative world that is created by the narrative (compare "alternative possible world" in Cover, 2010). The GM usually has "ultimate authority" but this picture is overly simplistic. Tradition, specific

¹ "Diegetic control" is who has the power or authority to enter things into the diegesis, i.e. "to make things true in the story".

agreements for the player group and the system being played all contribute to an often complex pattern of who gets to enter things into the narrative. Worthy of an article all on its own, details will not be provided here beyond the facet of the rules. Both the WoD and the LoA games had a specific game currency to allow players to enter specifics into the diegesis beyond their characters.

"It usually isn't stated right out, but sometimes it is, but all systems also carry their own more or less implicit understanding of the power of the players vis a vis the game master. In D&D, while 'the GM is god', s/he is also assumed to stick to the rules of the game and not change anything on the fly, on the other hand, because of the 'gaminess' of the rules, the players are also bound very strictly. In WoD, whatever the GM says goes, all the time. In LoA authority explicitly rests with the table, i.e. the group, and not solely the GM." [respondent refers to the specific games among the groups in this study, not those systems in general]

6. FLAVORS OF CREATIVITY

As is evident from the respondents and earlier research, tabletop role-playing games elicit several different "brands" of creativity, which is affected greatly by the role rules play in a specific game. Six of the more prominent are outlined below, with the most important roles rules play (italicized) for each.

Rules as support and rules as diegetic control mechanism is not linked to any specific type of creativity, instead having a more broad effect on the creative process.

6.1 Narrative (story) creativity

Narrative creativity refers to the ability or potential to create a good story, usually going outside your specific character (if you are not the GM) and looking at the story as a whole. Introducing new elements and re-visiting older elements (a hallmark of good narrative, according to Johnstone (1979)), developing the ongoing story and coming up with new arcs are all part of narrative creativity.

"Depending on the rules, you are either required to influence the story with only your character, or there might also be other venues afforded by the rules, such as with fate- and drama points. You can also make off-game suggestions, for example, but this is received differently in different groups."

Rules as creative coolant and rules as consistency-provider are most important for narrative creativity; both making sure that the story does not become too farfetched and retains internal consistency.

6.2 Acting creativity

Acting creativity is about being creative in the portrayal of your character (or characters, in the case of the GM), what many players consider the "core" of role-playing. Initially it was not separated from narrative creativity, but this is apparently a point of contention among players. Some think that a player should only concern him- or herself with this type of creativity, others think that narrative creativity is much more important.

*"I normally don't concern myself with the overall story that much, I like to immerse myself in the character completely, and really try to *be* that person. And since he or she doesn't look at his or her life as a story, neither do I – but of course I try to retain some sense not to ruin things completely."*

For acting creativity *rules as communication* is important, since it frees up the player to act on system inputs, as is *rules as randomness* which provides new angles to act upon.

6.3 Gaming creativity

More directly related to the rules system, this is the type of creativity exhibited when utilizing the rules towards some specific outcome. For many players this is "optimizing" their character, choosing the traits and abilities that will allow the character to succeed as much as possible, but also choosing the correct action rules-wise at any given moment. Heavily dependent on the rules-system used, which must be well-written and interesting if players are to bother.

"Comparing builds [a specific combination of character traits and abilities], scouring the rules for powerful combinations or ability synergies, finding how elements work together for maximum effect – this is the heart of D&D for me. But with other systems, this just isn't as possible"

The *rules as arbitrator* is central for gaming creativity, as it provides a sense of fairness and levels the playing field, emphasizing the "game" aspect of the TRPG. *Rules as randomness* is also important, since randomness affects everyone alike, and is something that can be manipulated through usage of the rules.

6.4 Problem-solving creativity

One of the focus points of Bowman's (2010) book, most TRPG scenarios include plenty of problem-solving. The problems come in a wide variety; tactical, social, political, strategic and more. This has to be balanced with acting creativity, lest the believability of a player's portrayal of his or her character suffers. While gaming creativity also covers some problem-solving, that is always under the auspices of the rules system and its mechanics, while this refers to more open-ended problem solving, such as coming up with a good plan or compromise between two conflicting factions.

"Almost none of the problem-solving we do have anything to do with the rules, the boundaries come from the setting, the situation and or characters."

"Problem-solving can be difficult, because you want to be smart and come up with good solutions, but at the same time you mustn't overplay [e.g. playing smarter or more skilled than the character is rules-wise] your character too much. But it can be very difficult playing dumber than you are, so we are usually pretty lenient with that."

Problem-solving creativity is among the things affected by *rules first* vs. *narration first* – in a rules first environment it can be difficult for good problem-solving strategies to gain traction, since the rules remain the same despite clever strategy. *Rules as consistency provider* is also important, since problem-solving can be difficult (or too easy) in a world with little consistency.

6.5 Game-world creativity

This is the creativity used to create the setting and elements within, such as your characters backstory, the geography or inhabitants of a region, organizations in the game world, and so on. This is generally uninfluenced by the system used, and heavily dependent on the division of diegetic control in the group and its traditions. It is closer to the craft of a writer, but not wholly, as care must be taken to adapt the world to the role-playing format.

"When we play LoA, we usually create the world together, relieving the burden on the game master and giving everyone the opportunity to be creative in constructing the setting. The GM acts as facilitator, but everyone introduces elements and develops each other's elements, provide suggestions, and so on"

"Since our WoD game is so dependent on the sense of mystery, the players participate very little in the world creation, instead uncovering the secrets of the GM piece by piece. But of course we have some influence, saying what elements we like, and so"

"The Pathfinder setting is pretty much written already, but you always get to make the background of your character and how it fits into that world"

Game-world creativity is largely influenced by *rules first* vs. *narration first* – *rules first* frees up the player to describe things very freely in the game world, since the descriptions do not affect the underlying rules much. *Rules as inspiration* is also important, the rules feeding information on the game world to the players.

6.6 System creativity

A form of meta-creativity, this is the creativity required to adapt the rules system to the specific group and its needs and wants. In many cases this is perceived as necessary to fix flaws and/or bugs in the rules system, often by removing parts deemed "unbalanced", but whole new elements can also be introduced, such as in the WoD game.

"Very few games can be played RAW [Rules As Written]; there is always something that doesn't suit our style of play, or is just plain broken. Often it is easy to fix, but sometimes you have to get really creative or rewrite sections altogether. And of course, sometimes we add entirely new rules structures, often adapted from other games"

System creativity is not particularly influenced by any of the roles, and this is hardly surprising given that system creativity is concerned with being creative with the rules themselves. Often players will try to bolster one or more of the roles above, often striving towards or just removing obstacles for their preferred type(s) of creativity.

7. DISCUSSION

The notion that TRPG groups usually do not engage in discussions with one another on the nature of their activity was readily supported by the respondents. Only a handful admitted to ever having talked beyond the superficial with another role-playing group, and many claimed that even within the group there was a significant lack of discussion on e.g. what the different players wanted out of the activity.

"I don't think I've ever talked to another role-playing group on issues beyond specific rules, personal characters or the like - and certainly never as a group. Problem is that even if I/we did, I'm not sure what we'd be talking about."

During the group discussions many seemed to experience their first real, in-depth discussion on what they got out of role-playing games, but the prejudices held against other role-players also came to the fore.

"What they are doing is not even role-playing in my book, it's just dice rolling and normal gaming, not unlike a computer role-playing game. Why anyone would waste time with it is beyond me."

While the existence of multiple forms of creativity in TRPGs is by no means a significant find on its own, it is important to understand its relation to the rules system used and that different systems cater to different individuals, because they prefer different forms of creativity.

During the group discussions many seemed to experience their first real, in-depth discussion on what they got out of role-playing games, but the prejudices held against other role-players also came to the fore.

The respondents also confirmed the lack of language when discussing TRPGs, and often retorted to the use of examples of other systems during the discussions, leading to some difficulty since all were not familiar with the examples.

Looking back at the GNS-model (Edwards, 2001), the gamist, narrativist and simulationist styles map quite well towards the gaming creativity, narrative creativity and acting creativity. The latter is probably the worst fit, since acting creativity does not necessarily imply a simulationist style. It is also important to mention that the respondents did not see the "competition" in the gamist style, and instead focused on the use of rules. This is probably because the GNS model has been presented somewhat differently than originally incepted in Swedish RPG circles. The inherent differences between the styles was also evident through the respondents in this study, showing that it can be hard to reconcile different playing

styles and that it is difficult to find rules that cater to all kinds of creativity.

Of the eight types of fun mentioned by Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek (2004), it is only the first, *games as sense-pleasure* which is not readily applicable to TRPGs – although it is not impossible that there is some ensemble out there that derive sense-pleasure through e.g. beautiful language, none of the respondents mentioned this. Out of the remaining seven, *game as make-believe*, *game as drama* and *game as obstacle course* can be associated with the creative aspects of the TRPG. Game as make-believe is closest to narrative creativity and game-world creativity, game as drama to narrative and acting creativity, and game as obstacle course to gaming and problem-solving creativity.

The respondents pointed out that although creativity in its many facets probably was the main reason they played TRPGs, creativity is not the only thing you get out of a TRPG. There is also the thrill of uncertainty, often aided by the rules' fortune aspect, the joy of camaraderie (a design ideal covered in Bergström, Lundgren and Björk, 2010) and the delight in exploring other worlds, maybe testing things that you would not do otherwise (Bowmann, 2010) – all of which corresponds rather well towards the remaining types of fun mentioned by Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek (2004). Thus, it could be unwise to tailor a game exclusively towards the facilitation of creativity at the expense of other areas.

One could argue that since players adapt the systems so much, and tend to choose systems that fit their style of play, a more relativist position – saying that the actual game artifact matters so little in relation to the group that uses it that a study of this kind becomes moot – but this would be unnecessarily shortsighted; the artifact does matter, at least according to the respondents. They all agree that significant adaptation takes place, but at the same time not everything has been written, and there just are not systems for all tastes out there.

At the same time, one must also be careful not to underestimate the impact on creativity from other sources than the rules system; as was mentioned in the methods chapter. However, the respondents mentioned that many of them never saw anything of the artifact except the rules as they were explained to them, perhaps a character sheet, which further complicates the matter.

7.1 The importance of diegetic control

Initially, the role rules played as distribution of diegetic control was not emphasized by the respondents, the reason probably being that diegetic control can be a sensitive subject, and that different groups have quite entrenched traditions on what the distribution should be, to the point that some did not even recognize the presence of alternative paradigms at first. However, as the discussion deepened, it became clear that it was how the rules tackled the distribution of diegetic control that seemed to have the most effect on player creativity. Also observe that “diegetic control” is equivalent of the power structures mentioned as a key component of the role-playing process in Montola (2009). Therefore it is interesting to go back to the games covered in the study, and look at how they influence what types of creativity becomes important through how their rules approach diegetic control:

In a game with strict diegetic control, such as D&D, where not only the roles of player and game master is rigidly defined but the rules also regulate the diegesis to a large extent, the players naturally turn to gaming creativity at the expense of narrative creativity. But with a very clearly defined rules-set there is also a tendency towards less problem-solving, as it can be difficult to undertake actions not covered by the rules. The importance of rules gave rise to system creativity, but mostly in a “fix” capacity, and not the introduction of new elements. This might not be the case for an audience less willing to play (or less familiar with) alternative systems, such as those that use the D&D rules for a greater diversity of games (Cover, 2010, Bowman 2010). This would make them adapt the system instead of choosing another, which in turn also fosters system creativity.

In the nWoD groups, diegetic control was significantly relaxed in comparison, with both the players being allowed (slightly) more leeway and the rules occupying more of a descriptive and advisory position. Accordingly, gaming creativity was largely absent and acting creativity more emphasized. Through drama points and the option to narrate entire sequences without explicit involvement of the GM, narrative creativity was possible to a great extent. System creativity was absent during the game as the rules remained fixed, but the game groups had both adapted the system beforehand to suit their needs and wishes. The LoA groups were somewhere in the middle rules-density wise, with clearly defined but loose

rules. There was also a clear “rules first” focus which de-emphasized problem-solving and instead encouraged narrative creativity. The simplicity of the rules removed gaming creativity, but the aspect- and fate-point system further boosted narrative creativity. Because the players were relatively unfamiliar with the system – FATE has not been around as long as the other systems – interpreting and adapting the rules required some system creativity. LoA was also more or less unique in its facilitation of game-world creativity, because of an emphasis on player created worlds and elements.

Initially, the role rules played as distribution of diegetic control was not emphasized by the respondents, the reason probably being that diegetic control can be a sensitive subject, and that different groups have quite entrenched traditions on what the distribution should be, to the point that some did not even recognize the presence of alternative paradigms at first.

8. CONCLUSION

This article has studied what role three TRPG rules systems have in facilitating player creativity through interviews and observation of six player groups. It has outlined nine different roles that rules can play in fostering player creativity, and how these influence six different types of creativity associated with tabletop role-playing. The most important probably being the distribution of diegetic control, which seems to have a far reaching effect on the creative expression.

This work is aimed at scholars interested in TRPGs and those looking to design TRPG systems, as well as TRPG players, or anyone else interested in the rather unique mesh of game-like rules and play-like creativity in TRPGs. The study provides greater insight into how the two fit together, help in the design of TRPG systems if looking to tailor them towards creativity, and offer more information on the creative expression of players of TRPGs. It also outlines a language of expression for some parts of the TRPG activity, which through the respondent-close methodology is hopefully as useful as possible to those that might need it.

9. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Staffan Björk for invaluable assistance during the editing process.

This work was performed within the integrated project TA2 (<http://www.ta2-project.eu>) which is funded by the EU's Seventh Framework Programme, grant agreement number 214793. The authors gratefully acknowledge the European Commission's financial support and the productive collaboration with the other TA2 consortium partners.

10. REFERENCES

- (1) Achilli, J. et al, 1998. *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Atlanta: White Wolf Publishing.
- (2) Baker, K., Slavicsek, B., 2004. Wyatt, J. *Eberron Campaign Setting*. Renton: Wizards of the Coast.
- (3) Barnes, O., Flack, K., Mason, M., 2008. *Dark Heresy*. Roseville: Fantasy Flight Games.
- (4) Bergström, K., 2010. The Implicit Rules of Board Games – on the particulars of the lusory agreement. In: *Mindtrek, Mindtrek - Envisioning Future Media Environments*. Tampere, Finland 6-8 October 2010. ACM Digital library.
- (5) Bergström, K., Lundgren, S., Björk, S., 2010. Exploring Aesthetical Gameplay Design Patterns –Camaraderie in Four Games. In: *Mindtrek, Mindtrek -Envisioning Future Media Environments*. Tampere, Finland 6-8 October 2010. ACM Digital Library.
- (6) Birch, C., Donachie, D., Newman, S. Nicol, D., 2008. *Starblazer Adventures*. Oxford: Cubicle 7 Entertainment.
- (7) Björk, S., 2008. Games, Gamers and Gaming – Understanding Game Research, In: *Mindtrek, Mindtrek- Entertainment and Media in the Ubiquitous Era*. Tampere, Finland 7-9 October 2008. ACM Digital Library
- (8) Björk, S., Holopainen, J., 2005. *Patterns in Game Design*. Hingham MA: Charles River Media.
- (9) Boss, E. C. 2008. *Key Concepts in Forge Theory*. In Stenros, J. & Montola, M. (eds.) *Playground Worlds*, pp. 232-247, Helsinki: Ropecon.
- (10) Bowman, S. L., 2010. *The Functions of Role-Playing Games*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company.
- (11) Boyle, R., Cross, B., 2009. *Eclipse phase -The Roleplaying Game of Transhuman Conspiracy and Horror*. Lake Stevens: Catalyst Game Labs.
- (12) Brannan, T. et al, 2002. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*. Loudonville, NY: Eden Studios.
- (13) Bridges, B., Chillot, R., Cliffe, K., Lee, M., 2004. *The World of Darkness*. Atlanta: White Wolf Publishing.
- (14) Bulmahn, J., 2009. *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*. Redmond, VA: Paizo Publishing.
- (15) Carson, S. H., Peterson, J. B., Higgins, D. M., 2005. Reliability, Validity, and Factor Structure of the Creative Achievement Questionnaire. *Creativity Research Journal*, 17, pp. 37–50
- (16) Collins, A. et al, 2008 *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition*. Renton: Wizards of the Coast.
- (17) Cook, M., Tweet, J., Williams, S., 2003. *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd edition*. Renton: Wizards of the Coast.
- (18) Costikyan, C., 1994. I Have No Words & I Must Design. In Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E. (eds.) *The Game Design Reader: a Rules of Play Anthology*, pp. 192-211, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- (19) Cover, J. G., 2010. *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company.
- (20) Czege, P., 2003. *My Life with Master*. Livonia, MI: Half Meme Press.
- (21) Donoghue, R., Hicks, F., 2003. *FATE*. Silver Spring, MD: Evil Hat productions LLC.
- (22) Edwards, R., 2001. GNS and Other Matters of Role-playing Theory, *Adept Press*, [online]. Available at: <http://www.indie-rpgs.com/articles/1/> [Accessed 1 August 2011]
- (23) Fine, G. A., 1983. *Shared Fantasy –Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

- (24) Gade, M., Thorup, L., Sander, M. (eds.), 2003. As Larp Grows Up. *Knudepunkt 2003* [online]. Available at: http://www.laivforum.dk/kp03_book/ [Accessed 1 August 2011]]
- (25) Gygax, G., Arneson, D., 1974. *Dungeons & Dragons*. Lake Geneva: TSR Inc.
- (26) Hendricks, S. Q. 2006. Incorporative Discourse Strategies in Tabletop Fantasy Role-Playing Gaming. In Williams, J.P., Hendricks, S. & Winkler, W. K. (eds.) *Gaming as Culture*, pp. 39-56, Jefferson: McFarland.
- (27) Holmes, M., Mazza, R., 2002. *Universalis: The Game of Unlimited Stories*. Peoria, IL: Ramshead Publishing.
- (28) Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R., 2004. MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research. In: *Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, Nineteenth National Conference on Artificial Intelligence*. San Jose, CA 25-29 July 2004. AAAI Press
- (29) Jackson, S., 1996. *GURPS Basic set Third Edition Revised*. Austin TX: Steve Jackson Games.
- (30) Jacobs, J., 2011. *Pathfinder Campaign Setting – The Inner Sea World Guide*. Redmond, VA: Paizo Publishing.
- (31) Johnstone, K., 1979. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.
- (32) Kaufmann, C. J., Sternberg, R. J. (eds.), 2010. *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- (33) Kvale, S. 1997. *Den kvalitative forskningsinterview*. Lund: Studentlitteratur AB.
- (34) Lambert, R. Rilstone, A., Wallis, J., 1995. *Once Upon a Time (extended edition)*. St Paul, MN: Atlas Games.
- (35) LeBlanc, M. 2006. Tools for Creating Dramatic Game Dynamics. In Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E. (eds.) *The Game Design Reader: a Rules of Play Anthology*, pp. 438-459, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- (36) Lundgren, S., Bergström, K. J., Björk, S., 2009. Exploring Aesthetic Ideals of Gameplay. In: *Digital Games Research Association, Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*. 1-4 September 2009. Digra.
- (37) MacKay, D., 2001. *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company.
- (38) Montola, M. 2009. The Invisible Rules of Role-Playing- The Social Framework of Role-Playing Process. *International Journal of Role-Playing 1*, pp. 22-36.
- (39) Mumford, M. D., 2003. Where have we been, where are we going? Taking stock in creativity research. *Creativity Research Journal*, 15, pp. 107-120.
- (40) Newton, S., Birch, C., 2010. *Legends of Anglerre*. Oxford: Cubicle 7 Entertainment.
- (41) Pramas, C., 1986. *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*. Nottingham, UK: Games Workshop.
- (42) Rilstone, A. (eds), 1994. *Interactive Fantasy*. London: Hogshead Publishing.
- (43) Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E. 2004. *Rules of Play*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- (44) Schick, L. 1991. *Heroic Worlds: A History and Guide to Role-playing Games*. Buffalo, NY: Prmoetheus Books.
- (45) Stenros, J., Montola, M. (eds), 2010. *Nordic Larp*. Stockholm: Fëa Livia.
- (46) Thomsson, H., 2002. *Reflexiva Intervjuer*. Lund: Studentlitteratur AB.
- (47) Tresca, M. J., 2011. *The Evolution of Fantasy Role-Playing Games*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company.
- (48) Tychsen, A., Newman, K., Brolund, T., Hitchens, M., 2007. Cross-format analysis of the gaming experience in multi-player role-playing games. In: *Digital Games Research Association, Situated Play*. 24-28 September 2007. Digra.
- (49) Varney, A., 2004. *Paranoia XP*. Swindon, UK: Mongoose Publishing.
- (50) White, W. J. 2009. Face and figuration in RPG play. In Holter, M., Fatland, E. & Tømte, E. (eds.) *Larp, the Universe and Everything*. Köpenhamn: Knutepunkt.

Karl Bergström was at the time of writing working as a researcher in the field of gameplay design, but is currently employed as a clinical psychologist in Stockholm.

An Embodied Cognition Approach for Understanding Role-playing

Popular abstract - The article proposes that the theories of grounded cognition and embodiment can be utilized in explaining the role-playing experience. Embodied cognition theories assume that cognition is not only a feature of the brain, but the body as a whole and it is interaction with the environment it operates in. Grounded cognition proposes that an action, perceiving an action, and thinking about an action rely on the same processes. Moreover, knowledge is inseparably grounded to bodily states and modalities. Based on the grounded cognition theory and especially embodiment, we argue the character immersion and bleed are natural consequences on how the brain works. Also we illustrate how the operation of simulators explains some of the central features in the creation of fiction and it is similarities to our everyday experiences. In general, grounded cognition provides a rather simple explanation how fiction is experienced as in this theoretical framework action and thinking about an action largely utilize the same brain mechanics and so are phenomenally similar.

Petri Lankoski
Södertörn University
Sweden
petri.lankoski@sh.se

Simo Järvelä
Aalto University
Finland
simo.jarvela2@aalto.fi

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article we explore what it means to play a character and how the characters and fictive game world are constructed. Our focus is in role-playing including both table-top and live-action role-playing games. We look at the role-playing experience and aim to provide psychologically plausible account on the playing experience and its relations to the game rules and materials by introducing the concepts of embodiment and grounded cognition. Our premise is that characters and pretending to be a character is a central aspect in the role-playing (Lieberoth 2008; Rognli 2008; Montola 2008). In fact, we argue that characters in some form are a prerequisite for role-playing.

Some authors have seen *immersion* as a key concept of describing the role-playing experience. However, the definition or ideas of immersion vary between authors. Kim (2004) refers to immersive story, whereas Harviainen (2003) distinguishes

three types of immersion: character immersion, narrative immersion and reality immersion. He sees that character immersion is “[t]he ability to ‘become’ a character, to assume its thought-patterns, ethics and personality.” (Harviainen 2003). Pohjola (2004) defines immersion as follows: “Immersion is the player assuming the identity of the character by pretending to believe her identity only consists of the diegetic roles”¹. Lappi (2007) writes that “Immersion means that a player takes temporarily things included in (her) imagined space for a part of everydayness.” Castellani (2009) proposes similar idea when he writes that immersion is “two interconnected and interdependent phenomena, each giving rise to the other: the situation when a participant feels the same emotions as his or her character, and the situation when a participant assumes his or her character’s personality.” These all have a shared idea that immersion is a state where the fiction of

¹ Diegetic is a synonym to fictive.

the game, in some extent, takes over the playing experience.²

In terms of psychological experience, it is unlikely that the players are able to experience a situation in similar way as a character fictively experiences the situation; moreover, it is very unlikely that the emotions of a character would be identical to the player. For example, if a character faced Lovecraft's horrific Cthulhu, the character would go mad from fear, whereas the player would experience anxiety.³ The same applies to the horror larps⁴ that try to frighten the players in order to produce authentic experiences, as in *Ground Zero* (Jokinen & Virtanen 1998); however, it would be very strange that the fact that the players are larping would not influence the experience (c.f., Apter 2007, pp.13–35).

Some designers (e.g., We Åker Jeep 2010) and researchers (Montola 2011) use the concept of *bleed* instead of immersion. The We Åker Jeep design community describes “bleed” in the following way: “Bleed is experienced by a player when her thoughts [sic] and feelings are influenced by those of her character, or vice versa” (We Åker Jeep 2010). However, this account has an issue: the character does not exist as an independent entity⁵ and, therefore, cannot have thoughts and feelings that would influence the player. This issue is related to the problem of how we can be touched by fiction (literature, films, and video games) and pity the fates of characters that do not exist (Radford 2004; Lamarque 2004; Tavinor 2009, pp. 130–142; Walton 1993, pp.240–258). Role-playing games are, obviously, different to literature, film, and video games, but these same questions are relevant if we want to understand the role-playing experience.

Immersion and bleed have been adopted in design and research vocabulary instead of *engrossment* used by Fine (1983) in *Shared Fantasy*:

“For the game to work as an aesthetic experience players must be willing to ‘bracket’ their ‘natural’ selves and enact a fantasy self. They must lose themselves to the game. This engrossment is not total or continuous, but it is what provides for the “fun” within the game.” (Fine 2002, p.4)

² See Holter (2007) on the different definitions of immersion.

³ This argument follows Carroll's (1990, pp.88–96) the critique of character identification in *Philosophy of horror: Or paradoxes of the heart*.

⁴ Larp is acronym for live-action role-playing games.

⁵ The character existence is relying on someone to imagine the character, think about it, describe it, or act as it.

Fine (1983) noted that role-playing requires a player to bracket their natural self and enact a fictional self, but performing as a character is not (and cannot be) total or continuous. Notably, the player might not always notice shifts from performing as character to performing as oneself. This is because the players use attitudes and solutions that are already learnt from previous experiences (e.g., ordinary life and other playing occasions) instead of playing as the character (Walton 1993, pp.138–187; Lankoski et al. 2004). This implies that the player is only able to act as a character part of the time. While Fine's account on the character-playing experience is plausible, his take does not explain engrossment from the psychological perspective, but merely describes the phenomenon.

However, this account has an issue: the character does not exist as an independent entity and, therefore, cannot have thoughts and feelings that would influence the player.

From the point of view of psychology, the set of concepts reviewed above do not describe the playing experience adequately, so a more nuanced account of the playing experience is needed. Recent research in psychology (Damasio 1994; Grafton 2009; Niedenthal et al. 2005) and philosophy (Gallagher 2005; Noë 2009; Lakoff & Johnson 1999) suggests that knowledge and experience are embodied or grounded which means that they are fundamentally tied to bodily states and action possibilities (which are relational to the environment). In this article we take the psychological theories of embodiment (Damasio 1989; Barsalou et al. 2003; Niedenthal et al. 2005) as a starting point to look at role-playing. The theory proposes that action, perceived action, and described action are similar in terms of the brain functions while they are phenomenologically different. This will be discussed in more detail below.

The main goal of this article is to provide an overview of the grounded cognition approach and

argue that this approach can provide a psychologically plausible theory for understanding the role-playing experience and process. We do not intend to explain all aspect of role-playing, but aim to explain the earlier takes on role-playing that relate to the field of psychology or philosophy of fiction (namely character interpretation and pretence-play or make-believe) and popular concepts describing playing experience (namely immersion and bleed).

In this paper we will first go through the concept of embodiment (and grounded cognition theory) in order to introduce a psychologically plausible cognitive background theory of role-playing to which more conceptual level models could be connected. After this we take a look at theories drawing from psychology and philosophy of fiction in order to partly describe the phenomenon that we aim to explain using the theories of grounded cognition. What follow is a description of the character as a theoretical construct and the process of role-playing on a conceptual level. And finally, we will see how the concepts used to explain characters and role-playing in this paper and various role-playing phenomena can be explained by embodiment and grounded cognition.

The theory proposes that action, perceived action, and described action are similar in terms of the brain functions while they are phenomenologically different.

2. GROUNDED COGNITION AND EMBODIMENT

So-called grounding problem in philosophy is about such questions as “how do words get their meaning?” and “how concepts are connected to the things they refer to?”—in grounded cognition theories embodiment is one answer to those questions. That is, embodiment is a way in which cognition can be grounded. The embodiment theory in general holds that cognition is determined not only by brain activity but by the whole bodies of organism and it’s relation to environment it operates in (Damasio 1994, pp.223–244; Noë 2009, pp.64–65). For instance, food is something that a rat or human can eat and that nourish; or weapon is something that human can

grip, swing and try to hurt others. In other words, the meaning of things is in tight connection to various action possibilities determined by the physical body in a physical environment. A simple brain in a jar would not be sufficient for humanlike cognition.

Grounded cognition is an alternative model of human cognition where all cognitive processing is in tight connection to modalities (ie. senses). In classical theories, higher cognitive functions are operated using amodal symbols that are somehow formed from sensory feedback. These symbols are then handled in the part of the brain that processes symbols. The brain is similar to a computer which operates using symbols. For example, when one perceives a dog, that perception is transformed to representational format where a dog is an animal with four legs and it barks (and so on). An example of such a theory is Fodor’s Language of Thought (e.g., Fodor & Pylyshyn 1988) where mental operations use amodal symbol level representations. In grounded cognition, the knowledge is structurally and inseparably grounded in bodily states and modality-specific system, for example dog’s barking is stored and processed in the auditory systems. In this line of thought, meaning is (in many cases) a relation between an organism and the environment. This means, for instance, that the ground and water are related to certain kinds of motor action possibilities and without these action possibilities there is no meaning for those. This meaning does not need to be conceptual: one does not need to have the words “ground” or “water” in order to know what the ground and water are. Naturally, abstract concepts are not directly tied to motor action possibilities in this way. However, Lakoff and Johnson (1999, pp. 60–73) argue that abstract concepts rely on sensorimotor categories via analogical and metaphorical relations to sensorimotor categories. Pragmatics, such as Peirce, has proposed similar idea how the action and meaning are connected. In 1878, Peirce (2012) argues that “[t]he essence of belief is the establishment of a habit; and different beliefs are distinguished by the different modes of action to which they give rise.”

In this section, we offer a short review on studies on grounded cognition and supporting evidence. There are several studies indicating that higher cognitive functions such as language, emotions and conceptual thinking and motor functions are connected. For more extensive reviews, refer to Barsalou (2008), Niedenthal et al. (2005), and

Martin (Alex Martin 2007). Before this review, it is important to note that there is a relatively small body of empirical evidence supporting the classical amodal view and support is often theoretical (see, Barsalou et al. 2003). Moreover, amodal theories have problems explaining how or where concepts and non-conceptual content is stored in the brain (Barsalou 2008) or what kind of process turns sensory input into abstract amodal symbols (Niedenthal et al. 2005).

2.1 Review of evidence supporting grounded cognition

The empirical evidence strongly supports the grounded approach when the focus is in non-abstract reasoning. Different studies suggest that there is no singular memory system or storage but different types of object properties are stored in the different parts of the brain. Importantly, studies indicate that motor-based object properties are stored in the motor systems and sensory-based properties in the various sensory systems of the brain (see review in Martin 2007.) In various fMRI⁶ studies showing pictures of various tools to participants it has been found that the recognition and naming of tools also activated cortical areas associated with motor functions (A. Martin et al. 1996; Chao & A. Martin 2000), suggesting that the motor system is involved in the processing of such images. Although, the interpretation of results in these types of studies has also been criticized, see for example Mahon and Caramazza (2008). In addition to the evidence from fMRI studies, experiments in psychology support the notion that motor actions are widely used in higher cognitive functions. A study found that cartoons were considered less funny when the smiling of participants was artificially prohibited by having them hold a pencil in their mouths (Strack et al. 1988). Studies have also shown that simple postures (flexed vs. extended arms) or movements (nodding vs. shaking of head) with positive or negative associations affect accordingly how

stimuli are evaluated (J. T. Cacioppo et al. 1993; Wells & Petty 1980). These findings strongly suggest that cognitive tasks such as language and item recognition and emotional evaluation of various stimuli and motor functions are highly connected.

In 1990s researchers discovered the *mirror neuron system*⁷ in the brain. The main feature of mirror neurons is that they activate when perceiving actions, thinking about action, and performing an action. It is argued that mirror neuron system is essential in understanding the actions and motor intentions of others (Rizzolatti & Craighero 2004; Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia 2010) as well as empathy (Decety & Jackson 2004).⁸

Mirror-neurons partly explain the mechanisms of how individuals imitate or mimic each other's bodily postures and facial expressions. The studies by Meltzoff and Moore (1995) confirm that imitation is inborn, as they show that infants (the oldest in one study was 72 hours and the youngest 42 minutes old) use successful facial imitation (pp. 49–51). The mimicry of facial expressions also leads to emotional contagion (Hess & Blairy 2001; Hatfield et al. 1993) between individuals; when perceiving facial expressions those expressions are mimicked which in turn cause emotions related to that expression to be felt. This is also the basis for empathy (Levenson & Ruef 1997). These phenomena strongly support the notion that motor functions, in this case facial muscles, are involved in interpretation of facial expressions and also in creation of emotions those expressions convey, and thus also support the theory of embodied cognition.

Overall, this short collection of studies indicates that motor functions are at least partly involved in higher cognitive functions. The strong form of the theory of embodied cognition assumes that the different systems are not sending messages to each other but (more or less inseparably) act as one system. Next, we will present simulators and

⁶ fMRI (Functional magnetic resonance imaging) is a method to measure brain activity by measuring blood flow changes in the brain.

⁷ Mirror neurons were originally discovered in macaque monkeys, but later also in the human brain (see, Rizzolatti & Craighero 2004).

⁸ A critical account to mirror neuron theory is presented, for example, in Hickock (Hickok 2009). Albeit, Hickock critique misses the point when he writes “musically untrained people can recognize, say, saxophone playing even if they’ve never touched the instrument, just as one can recognize actions of non-conspecifics”. Understanding saxophone playing, does not require that one *can* play saxophone, but merely being able to understand finger movement based on ones own motor action possibilities (and connect that to heard sounds). When one is trained saxophone player the understanding (naturally) changes when ones simulators have been updated (c.f., Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia 2010).

simulations, a model of cognition that is based on the premise of embodiment.

2.2 Perceptual symbols, simulators and simulations

When discussing cognitive theory of grounded cognition, the terms 'simulator' and 'simulation' are used in a very specific way that differs from the classic use in games and simulation research as in, for example, Crookall, Oxford & Saunders (1987). Here 'simulator' is roughly equivalent to 'concept' in meaning. We will shortly present how simulators are born and how they are used for simulations in grounded cognition.

Barsalou (1999) argues that cognition is a Perceptual Symbol System (PSS) and based on perceptual symbols, not amodal symbols. Perceptual symbols are modality-specific and stored in the modality-specific systems and are never converted into amodal symbols. These perceptual symbols are effectively created when perceiving something: that is, they are neural activation patterns in the modality-specific systems (e.g. auditory, visual, somatosensory, olfactory etc.). When interacting with the environment, some perceptual symbols are activated simultaneously and are soon linked together forming a simulator. Thus, a simulator for dog is a combination of perceptual symbols from different modalities (barking from auditory systems, hairiness from visual and somatosensory systems, and petting from the motor system). The same perceptual symbol for example hairiness can be a part of several simulators. (Barsalou 1999)

Barsalou (2003) explains that "[a] simulator is a distributed collection of modality-specific memories captured across a category's instances" (p. 88). According to Niedenthal et al., (2005) an entity can form simulators of different kinds of "objects (e.g., chairs), properties (e.g., red), people (e.g., politicians), emotional states (e.g., disgust), physiological states (e.g., hunger), actions (e.g., walking), events (e.g., dinner), settings (e.g., restaurants), relations (e.g., above), and so forth." (p. 195) For example, a simulator of swords contains the core perceivable features of the object as well as motor actions (swords can be used to cut or – if one knows more about swords – to counter attack after parrying) and mental states (it hurts if one gets hit by a sword) and bodily states (pain and damage if one is actually hit by a sword). The

simulator can be used to produce different simulations (roughly the same as conceptualisations), such as rapier, a one-handed sword designed for thrusting, and two-handed sword, designed for powerful cuts; these simulations are subsets of a simulator, not the whole simulator is used. In the case of the rapier, the one-handed sword, the parts of the simulator relating to the motor actions of the second hand are not used. Moreover, when one reads about a sword, the simulator of swords will be used to generate a simulation of a sword that enables one to visualize the object and understand what the sword can be used for. Or they can be thought of as different simulators with many overlapping parts; one simulator is not clearly distinct from another.

Once simulators are developed in long-term memory, they can be used to simulate different aspects of experience. Niedenthal et al. (2005) describe simulation as follows:

"The use of simulators in conceptual processing is called simulation. A given simulator can produce an infinite number of simulations, namely, specific representations of the category that the simulator represents. On a given occasion, a subset of the modality-specific knowledge in the simulator becomes active to represent the category, with this subset varying widely across simulations. For example, a simulator that represents the social category, my significant other, might be used to simulate love making with a significant other on one occasion, to simulate fights on another, to simulate quiet togetherness on another, and so forth." (Niedenthal et al. 2005, p.196)

The grounded cognition theory maintains that concepts are simulators and thinking with concepts are simulations. However, simulators are more than concepts and also include (so called) non-conceptual content⁹ such as motor skills. Also, simulators contain elements of which we are not at all consciously aware and their limits cannot be truly determined, thus being different from what is commonly meant by concepts.

Niedenthal et al. (2005) distinguish two forms of simulator use: online and offline processing. In cognitive processing bodily postures, bodily responses, and motor behaviour are associated with attitudes and action tendencies (such as avoiding that object, person, or thing). In online processing the object is present when the

⁹ E.g., about issues of non-conceptual content has been addressed in a book *Essays on non-conceptual content*, edited by Gunther (2003).

processing happens. However, in offline processing these associations (formed in online processing) are active when one is processing the word or relating to the entity¹⁰ or thinking the concept. (Niedenthal et al. 2005)

3. WHAT IS ROLE-PLAYING?

Before looking at role-playing from the point of view of grounded cognition, it is important to draft an idea of the role-playing process so that we can look at the process and explain main parts of it using grounded cognition. Most descriptions of role-playing process are grounded in other scientific disciplines and are not a suitable basis for more cognitive explanations (e.g., Montola 2008). Role-playing as a process can be analytically divided in two. The first part is internal and focused on a creative use of imagination around conceptual constructs such as character, game world and story. The other part is the procedural expression and sharing of this internal fiction with others and the procedure of combining these into a shared fiction. In practice, these two are mixed and cannot be distinguished entirely from each other but for the sake of clarity we will discuss them separately.

3.1 The process of role-playing as a form of pretence-play

Pretence-play and make-believe are concepts used to describe role-playing-like activities that have been used extensively in art studies and developmental psychology. For example, Harviainen (2012) sees formal similarities between role-playing and children pretence-play as well as common cognitive features. Hence, theories of pretence-play provide a wider theoretical framework in which role-playing as an activity can be examined. Earlier, Lankoski (2005) and Rognli (2008) have proposed that role-playing can be understood as adult form of pretence-play. Angeline Lillard (1993) lists five features of children pretence-play:

1. a pretender;
2. an actual world;
3. a representation of a fictive world that differs from a representation of the actual world;

4. a layering of the representation of the fictive world (3) over the actual world (2) so that they can exist within the same time and space;
5. awareness of the actual world (2), the representation of the fictive world (3), and layering (4). (Lillard 1993)

The listed qualities are also present in role-playing, but role-playing has more fixed conditions. Montola (2008) lists the following features of role-playing:

1. "Role-playing is an interactive process of defining and re-defining the state, properties and contents of an imaginary game world."
2. "The power to define the game world is allocated to participants of the game. The participants recognize the existence of this power hierarchy."
3. "Player-participants define the game world through personified character constructs, conforming to the state, properties and contents of the game world." (Montola 2008)

When comparing these feature lists, it is evident that role-playing and pretence-play are highly similar activities. Role-playing is a specific kind of pretence-play activity, namely pretending to be somebody else in fictional game world confined by rules. However, the above-mentioned definitions are not detailed enough to explain the role-playing activity.

In the case of role-playing games, a player builds an initial representation of a fictive game world from game materials. When the fictive world is created from a scratch, or based on some existing fictional setting and rules, the players need to add details, because the descriptions cannot be exhaustive. Naturally, the fictive world that the players imagine is never complete; thus the players need to constantly add details (Lankoski 2012; Nichols & Stich 2003, p.35). This adding, inevitably, is based on information available to a player (not to a character) and therefore details filled are more or less aligned with other information about the game world and characters. It is easier to fill details to a character that has similar traits as the player (Fine 2002, p.209) or when a fictive world resembles the

¹⁰ The term "entity" is used to denote person, creature, organism, and things (objects).

player's every-day environment. Otherwise, when one pretends to be someone that one is not familiar with, it tends to lead to stereotypical portrayal (c.f., Nakamura 2001; Nephew 2006). Some games have included rules to avoid falling back to familiar behaviours and to force the characters to behave according to game fiction: example of this are *Vampire: the Masquerade* (Rein-Hagen 1992) frenzy rules or *Call of Cthulhu* (Petersen 1981) insanity rules (Lankoski 2005; Lankoski et al. 2004).

Rules are not separate features; rather they influence playing and game fiction. One of the distinct features of role-playing is that the fiction is created by a collection of contributors (players). While they often have different roles and power structures (Montola 2008), each contributor follows similar inner and descriptive processes (descriptions, actions, system use), which together form the whole. Some part of the fiction created by the contributors is never communicated or shared with others and remains private, while most of it is.

This shared part of the fiction is more or less commonly agreed on and interpreted in equifinal manner (c.f., Lopenen & Montola 2004). It is also the part of the game which is typically explicitly monitored by rules, though some rules and their interpretations also direct the non-shared parts of the fiction (e.g., the frenzy rules in *Vampire the Masquerade* direct how each contributor plays her character even when not shared with others). The shared part of the fiction is also typically validated and accepted by other contributors as negotiating and solving conflicting views is an essential part of the process. Walton (1993, pp.138–187) argues that there are two important principles, the *Reality Principle* and the *Mutual Belief Principle*, which can explain many features in the interpretation of fictional works. *The Reality Principle* proposes that people will naturally assume the fictional world to be similar to the every-day experience, except for those parts that are explicitly stated in the fiction to be different (e.g. character and world descriptions, rules). The implicit parts of fiction are assumed to be similar to their everyday experiences. *Mutual Belief Principle* proposes that the common folklore and beliefs in the society influence how the fiction is interpreted. The inclusion of mutual beliefs of society, such as vampires suck blood and die in sun light, is not necessary in the fiction as they are assumed unless explicitly contested in the fiction. (Walton 1993, pp.144–161) In addition, role-playing games use an arbiter who can fill in details and explicate them when needed. Commonly the final

arbitrary power is wielded by a gamemaster. The non-shared part of fiction is naturally not negotiated and thus can contain conflicting elements more easily. In a larp, the negotiation and arbitration process is remarkably different as the actions become true in the fiction at the instant they are performed. They do not typically go through similar arbitration and negotiation process as actions in tabletop rpgs where it is easier to freeze or step back in time during the process. However, Walton's principles describe certain features of interpreting fiction, but not explain psychologically how these principles work. We return to this below.

This shared part of the fiction is more or less commonly agreed on and interpreted in equifinal manner.

3.2 Characters in RPGs

Characters have an important role in many forms of media, such as film, television and literature. Despite the seeming differences between characters in role-playing games and other forms of fiction, Carroll (1990), Smith (1995), and Currie (Currie 2004), among others, argue that all works containing characters are understood via characters and their intentions. Tavinor (2009) argues that players of character-driven video games are (emotionally, cognitively) immersed within the game because the player-character works as a proxy to the fictional world of a game. This proxy relation enables players to make sense of and react to what is happening within the game fiction (Tavinor 2009, pp.130–149).

Role-playing characters are, from the point of view of this paper, fundamentally similar cognitive constructs as other characters or people. Montola (2008) and Lankoski (2005) argues that that taking the role of a characters is the defining feature of role-playing. As seen above, role-playing games use wide range of different methods to feed information about game characters, but what is a character from the cognitive science point of view? A character, in this article, refers to an interpretation of a fictive or non-fictive human agent in a game. In the role-playing process the character is a central construct. Lankoski proposes the idea of person schema to understand role-playing (2005) and video game (2011) characters following Smith's (1995) argument for film character engagement.

Smith (1995) proposes that all human agents share some qualities, which include:

- a distinct human body;
- perceptual activities and self-awareness;
- intentions;
- emotions;
- ability to understand natural language;
- self impelled actions;
- persistent traits or abilities. (p. 21)

Smith argues that this set of qualities is used as a framework which enables people to interpret other people and characters, and to form expectations toward them. This framework is referred to as the *person schema*. (Smith 1995, pp.20–35). Smith describes a character construction process as follows:

“[Characters] are constructs formed on the basis of perceptual and explanatory schema (the person schema) which makes them salient and endows them with certain basic capabilities. Particular characters drawing on culturally specific schemata are built upon this foundation. And as with all other schemata, the person schema is subject to revision: we may apply the person schema to a brain-damaged individual, and be forced to revise it on discovering that the individual lacks certain capabilities presupposed by the schema.” (Smith 1995, p.31)

In this view, a person or a character is always a construction depending on various kinds of information such as perceived body, face, voice, actions, and descriptions. The person schema is used even when role-playing non-human characters like aliens, undead, monsters, or cartoon toasters. While those agents are superficially distinctly non-human, one’s inner logic is dominated by person schema when playing them and when interpreting them when they are played by someone else. (C.f. Smith 1995, pp.20–24)

Let us first look at the characters played by other players. The construction of properties of a character played by others normally depends on external perceivable traits of the agent. Usually this means that the body is used as the basis of the first interpretation of the person. Later on interpretation

is revised after new information is acquired. (C.f., Smith 1995, pp.114–118). In table-top role-playing games a character is rendered predominantly by linguistic devices (names and descriptions) while live-action role-playing games relies primarily on body, clothes, actions performed by the player, and dialogue. Hence, there is a difference between live-action and tabletop role-playing games. Nevertheless the difference can be minimal in some forms of tabletop and live action role-playing games (like games based on intrigue and negotiation) in which information about characters is mostly conveyed through dialogue.

The players need to construct their own characters before they can role-play it. One’s own characters are constructed in similar fashion to other characters. The main difference is that rule-system and action possibilities and limitations influence construction of persistent traits or abilities in more direct manner than other characters (Lankoski et al. 2004; Lankoski 2011). In live-action role-playing games (larp), the body of a player is something that the player cannot change¹¹ and can never fully escape limitations set by his body and skills; the limitations of a player restrict their ability to portray a certain character. Thus the physical and psychological limitations of the players influence also how others will perceive that character.

Next, we look at how these above-mentioned observations, especially the person schema, can be explained using the theories of grounded cognition.

4. GROUNDED COGNITION IN ROLE-PLAYING

In this section we illustrate how the grounded cognition approach can explain the features of role-playing and pretence-playing introduced above. After that we look at a selection of games and explain 1) why those games produce described playing experiences or 2) what kind of experiences the game is likely to produce using the above-presented grounded cognition theories.

4.1 The role-playing experience

Here we argue that grounded cognition and embodiment can explain the features of playing described above in the section Role-playing

¹¹ There are some temporal modifications that one can do to oneself to alter a sense of body (such as binding a hand to body so it cannot be used) that will influence body perception; of course, one can alter a body more permanently (e.g., by body-building or using plastic surgery, but that is changing the self).

process. We propose that because we are embodied in a certain way, the features of person schema, immersion (and its relatives), and the game fiction surface.

4.1.1 Person schema

Person schema discussed above can also be placed in the grounded cognition framework. A person schema is a simulator that is used online and offline to produce simulations in a wide variety of contexts. It is a strong and constantly used simulator. The qualities of the simulator pervade the simulation forming the so called person schema, that is, the tendency to think of all human (like) agents through those similar qualities. In role-playing context, when a character is played, such as a barbarian in *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax 1977), the player uses existing simulators to represent the barbarian and the other aspects of that character. The simulator for “barbarian” is likely to be formed by repeated experiences with fiction (such as *Conan* in books, films, and comics) but will be contextualized for *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* and the specific game world in use. Similarly, simulators used for archaeologist in the *Call of Cthulhu* (Petersen 1981) would be build on the simulators from various sources (archaeologist as in pulp fiction/Indiana Joneses/Call of Cthulhu and in everyday life) and contextualized within Cthulhu mythos. This contextualization is different if the player is familiar with the mythos or not. The simulation of barbarian and other simulations relating to the character are then used to represent various aspects of that character, in making decisions as the character and in acting as the character (e.g., speaking, expressions). When playing a certain character over time, a specific simulator for that specific character forms, and that would be used in simulations relating to that character.¹²

The simulator for “barbarian” is likely to be formed by repeated experiences with fiction (such as Conan in books, films, and comics) but will be contextualized for Advanced Dungeons and Dragons and the specific game world in use.

4.1.2 Game fiction

Lillard’s (1993) definition of pretence-play (see above) emphasizes the existence of a real world, a fictive world and the conscious layering of those two. In terms of simulators and simulations, the process of pretence-play consists of using the simulators that are based on real world experience and simulators that are related to the fiction in question in conjunction. Meanwhile Montola’s (2008) definition could be paraphrased as “Role-playing is an interactive process of defining and re-defining the simulator(s) which includes state, properties and contents of an imaginary game world”. As the real world simulators are also constantly in use, it is never fundamentally about becoming the character, although contextual processing ensures that representations simulated are specific to the game, or more specifically, to the player’s interpretation of the game fiction.

Contextualized processing is important in understanding game fiction. This means that people do not process generic representations of things without context; rather the processing always simulates a particular instance of an entity along with the action possibilities with that particular entity. For example, when I am entering my office floor, a door simulator includes the actions of using a key card to unlock the door and the actions needed to open the door—whereas in a computer game a door simulator takes a form that includes actions needed to pass the door (pressing the x-button on the gamepad near the door or just walking toward the door), or whether the rules of a game require a skill check to open the door (and how that skill check is performed).

The above-described Walton’s (1993) *Reality Principle* and *Mutual Belief Principle* can be explained through embodiment. As people use simulators from everyday life as bases of simulation (that is, to produce representations of the fictional world), the everyday life features of the simulator are attached to an instance of the simulator when the context does not require creating another kind of simulator instance.

As motor actions are always part of the simulation, the possibility of various actions is always present in physical objects. Already a perception of an object activates the simulator and so action possibilities are constantly present. While everyday objects are processed with everyday simulators and therefore open everyday action possibilities,

¹² The simulator for the character can be modification of the simulator for previously played character.

fiction-related objects activate fiction-related simulators or are instantiated with fiction-related action possibilities. These objects with an additional fictive component are called props. Importantly, while in everyday context the broom handle opens up action possibilities related to cleaning, extended reach, leverage and hitting something—in pretence-play context (such as child's play or larp) the interpretation of the object opens up fiction related action possibilities in addition to these everyday action possibilities, depending on the game fiction and rules (e.g., the broom can be used for flying or hexing or to represent a sword).

An important part of embodied theories is mimicry and mirroring of the expressions of other people. Affective mimicry refers to phenomenon where perceived emotional expressions are mirrored involuntarily (e.g., Barsade 2002). This mirroring can range from very small muscle activations to clearly perceivable expression. Niedenthal et al. (2005) argue that mimicry is fundamental for social information processing and others (e.g., Decety & Jackson 2004) have proposed that affective mimicry explains the core of empathy (that is, why we react emotionally to the emotional expressions of other people).

Online and offline processing are both relevant in role-playing. In tabletop role-playing most elements in fiction are not physically present in the gaming environment and thus they are subject to offline processing (see above). When the player is imagining and describing her barbarian character's actions in combat, she is using a simulator for that character to create a simulation of the situation which includes the player's ideas of related motor actions needed to swing a sword and to dodge a fireball. In live action role-playing there are considerably more elements physically present and thus they are processed online.

In 360 illusion games the design goal is to create an environment where there is no difference between the real surroundings and the fictional world. These games foreground online processing where every physical object is part of the game and there are no relevant fictional objects that should be imagined or processed offline. As the boundary between tabletop and larp is ambivalent also the online and offline modes are not easily distinguishable. The two modes, larp and tabletop, *feel* different (i.e., are phenomenologically

different), just because they are embodied differently.

4.1.3 Immersion, bleed, and engrossment

Embodiment gives a very simple explanation for the immersion experience: because in role-playing games players are making decisions for the character, the experience always has a *I am acting as my character* component (in larps, the player is also physically acting as character) (c.f., Lankoski 2011). The quality of immersion depends on how much information directly relates to the fictive frame of the game and how much non-fictive-related information there is or how well the player is able to ignore the non-fictive information. For example, throwing dice in table-top can be throwing the dice or killing a dangerous monster in one blow. From the point of view of character immersion acting has interesting feature: when acting one uses the simulators of those actions, and those simulators can contain emotions. Hence, acting happy or angry can change the actor's emotional state toward the acted emotion (c.f., Dimberg et al. 2000; Duclos et al. 1989).

In the context of embodiment, the concept of bleed is quite artificial. A character as a simulator is a combination of other simulators and contains a tremendous amount of non-fictive components by nature. Here, again, simulators invoking emotions can explain bleed experiences. Also it is impossible to clearly define the borders of a simulator. In addition, the border between the player and a character gets blurred, because of situated processing: the character is the context which is used to create particular simulators for that situation (including simulators for "I"). Thus, from this perspective it is impossible to clearly distinguish the character from the player and "bleed" turns into a built-in feature of the human cognitive system.

Thus, from this perspective it is impossible to clearly distinguish the character from the player and "bleed" turns into a built-in feature of the human cognitive system.

4.2 Case studies

Above, we proposed how grounded cognition can explain the role-playing experience in a general

sense. Next we look at specific cases and discuss them in relation to this theory. In the *Call of Cthulhu* case study we combine the grounded cognition theory and an analysis of the game system. The case studies of *Gang Rape* (Wrigstad 2008) and *Ground Zero* (Jokinen & Virtanen 1998) are based on Montola's (2011) and Hopeametsä's (2008) analyses of the playing experiences. We combine these analyses and the grounded cognition theory to explain why the experience is as described.

4.2.1 *Call of Cthulhu*

In a traditional tabletop role-playing game, such as the *Call of Cthulhu*, embodiment works on many levels. The most obvious one is the way simulators of the characters' actions within the game fiction are linked to motor functions of said actions. Also the common simulators (e.g. person schema type of simulators) related to role-playing in general, which we have presented throughout this paper, are relevant. However, a more interesting feature of the game is its above-mentioned insanity rules. Here, the players learn to attach a new feature of certain agents, the monsters, of the game. In addition to being very dangerous in combat and being able to kill the player-characters easily, just the mere presence of the monster can make the player-character go mad with a failed insanity check. The players learn, in other words create a new simulator for the monster, with this feature. In addition, they need to include the details of the insanity check and how its results are portrayed in the game. The simulator, within time, is likely to include emotions relating to losing a valued character by failing an insanity check.

4.2.2 *Gang Rape*

Montola (2011) describes the game *Gang Rape* (Wrigstad 2008), which aims at an extreme, repulsive experience. Montola describes the game as follows:

"It plays out in three scenes: an introduction leading to a rape, the act itself and an epilogue. All scenes are role-played in different ways: while the scene leading to the rape is played as a larp, the rape is played verbally, in a fashion similar to table-top role-playing" (Montola 2011)

He analyses the playing experience of the game based on interviews he conducted. The presented interview anecdotes seem to confirm that the game delivers the intended experience. The interviewed players mention certain features of the game:

- the need of keeping eye contact with the victim was scary;
- the reactions of other players added to the experience;
- being disgusted by the actions one was depicting. (Montola 2011)

Again, the above-presented theory of embodiment can explain the playing experience (but not why certain kinds of players seek these kinds of extreme experiences). For this, the rule that requires keeping eye contact in the rape scene is important, because it forces players to focus on facial expressions and prevent typical strategies to avoid affective mimicry. Affective mimicry and negative attitudinal dispositions associated¹³ with simulators of described actions are likely to modulate negative emotions to these actions or breaking taboos.

4.2.3 *Ground Zero*

Ground Zero was a larp where players spend 24 hours in a bomb shelter. The game's backstory takes players to 1960s. The characters escape to a bomb shelter. Our description summarises Hopeametsä's (2008) study of the game. The only written rule of the game was that the doors of bomb shelter were locked (as they were required to be kept open for security reasons). The game was based on the characters and their relations. The game area contained hidden speakers that were used for radio broadcasts coming outside as well as to simulate a shockwave (of a missile attack) that made it feel like the whole space was shaking.

The players described the playing experience to be very immersive (Hopeametsä 2008).

There are three important factors that shape the playing experience:

1. When other players role-played and acted according to the game fiction, their acting was mirrored and interpreted.
2. When the player is acting according to the fiction, the contextualized simulators are

¹³ However, psychopaths have been shown not to react expressions of fear and pain emotionally (Verschuere et al. 2006) and (high-performing) autistic individuals have issues with social cognition, especially in empathy (Baron-Cohen et al. 1985; Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright 2004; Goldman 2006, pp.200–206). In addition, in some context, people might lose their negative attitudinal dispositions to certain kinds of actions (c.f., Zimbardo 2007).

used to act as if the character and the fiction were true. Importantly, the player acted and those actions also influenced the experience: for example, acting scared will modulate one's emotional state toward being scared, because the simulators used in acting and the actual actions performed will also activate neurons in emotional areas, and those activations will influence the body state on a more general level)

3. The fiction is maintained and updated via radio: information fed there will be activating contextual simulations relating to fiction. Moreover, players do not need to imagine the shock-wave, but experience it. The contextual simulators, again, provide an interpretation of that which is tied to the game context.

The factors made the fiction seem very authentic.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We have described the role-playing process and discussed the concept of character in terms that are suited to be examined in the light of theories of grounded cognition and embodiment. We have illustrated how the concept of embodiment works as a general cognitive background theory for role-playing. Fictional characters have been studied earlier in the philosophy of fiction. Role-playing game characters have many commonalities with them. While the typical conceptual qualities of characters remain the same, the process of defining and acting out the character is different as it is in tight connection with the interpretation and creation of the whole fiction in collaborative effort. The nature of the process is such that all participants have access to varying parts of the fictive whole and thus their whole interpretation varies. Some individual parts of the fiction are never shared with others but still affects the whole. However, the fiction is surprisingly coherent between players, because embodiment and embodied action possibilities limit players' capabilities to simulate something different. In other words, the simulators players have and use during role-playing are largely based on their everyday experiences and only some of them are strictly fiction related. This is both a blessing and a curse, as they both enable a coherent fiction to be created in the first place but also tend to guide it into very similar structures through such

mechanics as for example person schema and reality principle.

An interesting implication for grounded cognition is that acting, role-playing, and goal-oriented play can lead to very similar experiences. Simulations in acting and role-playing (thinking as-if a character) are largely the same. In terms play, systemic aspect support pretence-play, related simulations are partly the same. Hence, these three types (acting, role-play, and goal-oriented play) are psychologically rather close to each other.

In this article we have proposed that grounded cognition can be used to explain a variety of playing experiences using a single theory. Furthermore, embodiment explains phenomenological experiences of character and player (e.g., bleed) and world immersion without the logical issues of previous accounts, such as the requirement for a fictive autonomous being— a character. Naturally, while not everything can be explained with above-presented theories, it is our belief that we have illustrated how embodiment (and grounded cognition in general) can act as shared background theory for understanding role-playing experience and bind together various approaches to gameplay experience in role-playing research. Perhaps it could even be used as a criterion for psychological plausibility when designing role-playing games.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We like to express our gratitude for anonymous reviewers and Risto Paalanen for their valuable feedback on the previous versions of this article.

7. REFERENCES

- (1) Apter, M., 2007. *Danger: Our quest for excitement*, Oxford: Onworld Publications.
- (2) Baron-Cohen, S., Leslie, A.M. & Frith, U., 1985. Does the autistic child have a "theory of mind"? *Cognition*, 21(1), pp.37–46.
- (3) Baron-Cohen, S. & Wheelwright, S., 2004. The empathy quotient: An investigation of adults with Asperger syndrome or high functioning autism, and normal sex differences. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 34(2), pp. 163–175.
- (4) Barsade, S.G., 2002. The ripple effect: Emotional contagion and its influence on

- group behavior. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47(4), pp.644–675.
- (5) Barsalou, L.W., 2008. Grounded cognition. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 59(1), pp.617–645.
 - (6) Barsalou, L.W. et al., 2003. Grounding conceptual knowledge in modality-specific systems. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 7(2), pp. 84–91.
 - (7) Barsalou, L.W., 1999. Perceptual symbol systems. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 22(04), pp.577–660.
 - (8) Cacioppo, J.T., Priester, J.R. & Berntson, G.G., 1993. Rudimentary determinants of attitudes: II. Arm flexion and extension have differential effects on attitudes. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 65(1), p.5.
 - (9) Carroll, N., 1990. *The philosophy of horror: Or, paradoxes of the heart*, Taylor & Francis. Available at: <http://books.google.se/books?id=0y8diTkY-KsC>.
 - (10) Castellani, A., 2009. The vademecum of the karstic style. In M. Holter, E. Fatland, & E. Tømte, eds. *Larp, the Universe and Everything*. pp. 187–196. Available at: <http://knutepunkt.laiv.org/2009/book/TheVademecumOfTheKarsticStyle/> [Accessed September 14, 2012].
 - (11) Chao, L.L. & Martin, A., 2000. Representation of manipulable man-made objects in the dorsal stream. *Neuroimage*, 12(4), pp.478–484.
 - (12) Crookall, D., Oxford, R. & Saunders, D., 1987. Towards a reconceptualization of simulation: From representation to reality. *Simulation/ Games for Learning*, 17(4), pp.147–71.
 - (13) Currie, G., 2004. *Arts and minds*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - (14) Damasio, A., 1994. *Descartes' error: emotion, reason and the human brain*, New York, NY: Benguin Books.
 - (15) Damasio, A., 1989. Time-locked multiregional retroactivation: A systems-level proposal for the neural substrates of recall and recognition. *Cognition*, 33(1-2), pp.25–62.
 - (16) Decety, J. & Jackson, P.L., 2004. The functional architecture of human empathy. *Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience Reviews*, 3(2), pp.71–100.
 - (17) Dimberg, U., Thunberg, M. & Elmehed, K., 2000. Unconscious facial reactions to emotional facial expressions. *Psychological Science*, 11(1), pp.86–89.
 - (18) Duclos, S.E. et al., 1989. Emotion-specific effects of facial expressions and postures on emotional experience. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(1), p.100.
 - (19) Fine, G.A., 2002. *Shared fantasy: role playing games as social worlds*, University of Chicago Press.
 - (20) Fodor, J.A. & Pylyshyn, Z.W., 1988. Connectionism and cognitive architecture: A critical analysis. *Cognition*, 28(1), pp.3–71.
 - (21) Gallagher, S., 2005. *How the body shapes the mind*, Oxford University Press.
 - (22) Goldman, A.I., 2006. *Simulating minds: the philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience of mindreading*, Oxford University Press.
 - (23) Grafton, S.T., 2009. Embodied cognition and the simulation of action to understand others. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1156(1), pp.97–117.
 - (24) Gunther, Y.H., 2003. *Essays on nonconceptual content*, MIT Press.
 - (25) Gygas, G., 1977. *Advanced dungeons & dragons*, Lake Geneva: TSR.
 - (26) Harviainen, J. Tuomas, 2012. Ritualistic games, boundary control, and information uncertainty. *Simulation & Gaming*, 43(4), pp.506–527.
 - (27) Harviainen, J. Tuomas, 2003. The multi-tier game immersion theory. In M. Gade, L. Thorup, & S. Sander, eds. *s larp grows up: The lost chapters - more theory and method in larp*. Frederiksberg: Projektgruppen KP03, p. 4.
 - (28) Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. & Rapson, R., 1993. Emotional contagion. *Current Directions in Psychological Sciences*, 2, pp.96–99.
 - (29) Hess, U. & Blairy, S., 2001. Facial mimicry and emotional contagion to dynamic emotional facial expressions and their influence on decoding accuracy. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 40(2), pp.129–141.
 - (30) Hickok, G., 2009. Eight problems for the mirror neuron theory of action understanding in monkeys and humans. *Journal of cognitive neuroscience*, 21(7), pp.1229–1243.
 - (31) Holter, M., 2007. Stop saying “immersion”! In *Lifelike*. Projektgruppen KP07, pp. 19–22.
 - (32) Hopeametsä, H., 2008. 24 Hours in a bomb shelter: Player, character and immersion in

- Ground Zero. In M. Montola & J. Stenros, eds. *Playground worlds: Creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*. Helsinki: Ropecon ry, pp. 187–198.
- (33) Jokinen, J. & Virtanen, J., 1998. *Ground Zero*.
- (34) Kim, J., 2004. Immersive story: A view of role-played drama. In M. Montola & J. Stenros, eds. *Beyond role and play: Tools, toys and theory for harnessing the imagination*. Helsinki: Ropecon ry.
- (35) Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M., 1999. *Philosophy in the flesh: the embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*, Basic Books.
- (36) Lamarque, P., 2004. How can we fear and pity fictions. In P. Lamarque & H. Olsen, eds. *Aesthetics and the philosophy of art*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 328–336.
- (37) Lankoski, P., 2012. Computer games and emotions. In J. R. Sageng, H. Fossheim, & T. M. Larsen, eds. *The Philosophy of Computer Games*. Philosophy of Engineering and Technology. Springer Netherlands, pp. 39–55. Available at: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/q568k3q6l7304202/abstract/> [Accessed September 14, 2012].
- (38) Lankoski, P., 2011. Player character engagement in computer games. *Games and Culture*, 6, pp.291–311.
- (39) Lankoski, P., 2005. Playing a character.
- (40) Lankoski, P., Montola, M. & Stenros, J., 2004. Character design fundamentals for role-playing games. In *Beyond Role and Play - tools, toys, and theory for harnessing the imagination*. Helsinki: Ropecon ry, pp. 139–148.
- (41) Lappi, A.-P., 2007. Playing beyond facts: Immersion as a transformation of everydayness. In *Lifelike*. Projektgruppen KP07, pp. 75–79.
- (42) Levenson, R.W. & Ruef, A., 1997. Physiological aspects of emotional knowledge and rapport. In W. Ickes, ed. *Empathic accuracy*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- (43) Lieberoth, A., 2008. Are you the daddy? Comparing fantasy play in children and adults through Vivian Gussin Paley's A Child's Work. In M. Montola & J. Stenros, eds. *Playground worlds creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*. Helsinki: Ropecon ry, pp. 206–215.
- (44) Lillard, A.S., 1993. Pretend play skills and the child's theory of mind. *Child Development*, 64 (2), pp.348–371.
- (45) Loponen, M. & Montola, M., 2004. A semiotic view on diagetive construction. In M. Montola & J. Stenros, eds. *Beyond role and play: Tools, toys and theory for harnessing the imagination*. Helsinki: Ropecon ry, pp. 39–51.
- (46) Mahon, B.Z. & Caramazza, A., 2008. A critical look at the embodied cognition hypothesis and a new proposal for grounding conceptual content. *Journal of Physiology-Paris*, 102(1), pp. 59–70.
- (47) Martin, A. et al., 1996. Neural correlates of category-specific knowledge. *Nature*, 379(6566), pp.649–652.
- (48) Martin, Alex, 2007. The representation of object concepts in the brain. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58(1), pp.25–45.
- (49) Meltzoff, A. & Moore, M., 1995. Infants' understanding of people and things: From body imitation to folk psychology. In J. Bermúdez, A. Marcel, & N. Eilan, eds. *The body and the self*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 43–69.
- (50) Montola, M., 2008. The invisible rules of role-playing. The social framework of role-playing process. *International journal of role-playing*, 1(1), pp.22–36.
- (51) Montola, M., 2011. The painful art of extreme role-playing. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds*, 3(3), pp.219–237.
- (52) Nakamura, L., 2001. Race In/For Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet. Available at: http://mysite.du.edu/~lavita/dmst_2901_w12/docs/nakamura_race_in_cyberspace.pdf [Accessed September 11, 2012].
- (53) Nephew, M., 2006. Playing with Identity: Unconscious Desire and Role-playing Games. In J. P. Williams, S. Q. Hendricks, & K. Winkle, eds. *Gaming as Culture*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, pp. 120–139.
- (54) Nichols, S. & Stich, S.P., 2003. *Mindreading: An integrated account of pretence, self-awareness, and understanding other minds*, Oxford University Press, USA.
- (55) Niedenthal, P.M. et al., 2005. Embodiment in Attitudes, Social Perception, and Emotion.

- Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 9(3), pp.184–211.
- (56) Noë, A., 2009. *Out of our heads: why you are not your brain, and other lessons from the biology of consciousness*, New York: Hill and Wang.
- (57) Petersen, S., 1981. *The call of Cthulhu*, Oakland: Chaosium.
- (58) Pohjola, M., 2004. Autonomous identities: Immersion as a tool for exploring, empowering and emancipating identities. In M. Montola & J. Stenros, eds. *Beyond role and play: Tools, toys and theory for harnessing imagination*. Helsinki: Ropecon ry, pp. 81–96.
- (59) Radford, C., 2004. How can we be moved by the fate of Anna Karenina. In P. Lamarque & H. Olsen, eds. *Aesthetics and the philosophy of art*. Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 300–306.
- (60) Rein-Hagen, M., 1992. *Vampire: The masquerade*, Stone Mountain: White Wolf.
- (61) Rizzolatti, G. & Craighero, L., 2004. THE MIRROR-NEURON SYSTEM. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 27(1), pp.169–192.
- (62) Rizzolatti, G. & Sinigaglia, C., 2010. The functional role of the parieto-frontal mirror circuit: interpretations and misinterpretations. *Nat Rev Neurosci*, 11(4), pp.264–274.
- (63) Rognli, E., 2008. We are the great pretenders: Larp is adult pretend play. In M. Montola & J. Stenros, eds. *Playground worlds creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*. Helsinki: Ropecon ry, pp. 199–205.
- (64) Smith, M., 1995. *Engaging characters: fiction, emotion, and the cinema*, Clarendon Press.
- (65) Strack, F., Martin, L.L. & Stepper, S., 1988. Inhibiting and facilitating conditions of the human smile: A non-obtrusive test of the facial feedback hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, pp.768–777.
- (66) Tavinor, G., 2009. *The art of videogames*, Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- (67) Verschuere, B. et al., 2006. Psychopathy and physiological detection of concealed information: A review. *Psychologica Belgica*, 46 (1-2), pp.99–116.
- (68) Walton, K.L., 1993. *Mimesis as make-believe: on the foundations of the representational arts*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- (69) We Åker Jeep, 2010. Dictionary. Available at: jeepen.org/dict/ [Accessed April 20, 2011].
- (70) Wells, G.L. & Petty, R.E., 1980. The effects of over head movements on persuasion: Compatibility and incompatibility of responses. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 1 (3), pp.219–230.
- (71) Wrigstad, T., 2008. *Gang rape*,
- (72) Zimbardo, P.G., 2007. *The Lucifer effect*, New York: Random House.

Petri Lankoski, D. Arts, is a senior lecturer in game studies at the Södertörn University. His research focuses on experience and game design. His games include *Lies and Seductions* (video game) and *The Songs of North* (pervasive game) as well as larps campaigns.

Simo Järvelä (Aalto University) has studied human resources management and cognitive science. He has been involved in games research using psychophysiological methods since 2007. He is an active gamer since childhood, and was the other organizer of the street larp campaign *Neonhämärä* (2008-2012) in Helsinki.

A tale of two cities: Symbolic capital and larp community formation in Canada and Sweden

Popular abstract - Larp events are not isolated, but happen in a larger context of a community of larping participants. Like all communities, members will share ideas about good and bad practices and behaviour and develop norms that tie the members together. Organizers can then use language to communicate which practices they emphasize as important, and what they consider good or bad practices for their event. Such norms can be invoked for the purpose of legitimizing the larp in the community and can then be transformed into attributes of symbolic capital with a power of their own. In this way, the events build on, and generate, such symbolic attributes, which take on significance for community homogenization. Larp events can thus be seen as an expression of established community practices.

The purpose of this article is to locate common attributes of symbolic capital in the presentations of eight larps from two cities, Edmonton, Canada, and Stockholm, Sweden. The documents of the larps are analysed using Pierre Bourdieu's theory, which discusses how symbolic capital can structure social space, to identify common denominators and reveal central community values.

The inquiry concludes that different symbols for proper larp have been adopted in the two cities, where the Edmonton community has a strong emphasis on rule-books and mechanics, while the Stockholm community is focusing more on the exploration of dramatic themes and authenticity. This indicates that the two communities can be thought of as different social spaces, distinctly separate from each other. The article also includes a discussion about the potential implications of authoritative symbols and their role as a homogenizing force within a larp community.

Keywords: Larp; Bourdieu; Culture; Symbolic capital; power; Habitus; Stockholm; Edmonton;

Mikael Hellstrom
University of Alberta
Canada
mikaelh@ualberta.ca

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and thesis statement

Several aspects of the social dynamics between actors involved in role-playing activity has received attention over the past decade. This includes the inherent power relations and the roles required to structure the activity (Stenros and Hakkarainen, 2003; Mäkelä, Koistinen, Siukola and

Turunen, 2005), the significance of the invisible rules for the relationships between those roles (Montola, 2007; 2008), as well how the game master's key role of setting the stage for players influences this relationship (Mackay, 2001; Sandberg 2004; Pettersson 2006). For larp specifically, the power relations between organizers and players and how they can be levelled for the

purpose of producing an event collaboratively has been discussed (Svanevik, 2005) and its implementation illustrated in an account for the larp event *The White Road* (Pedersen and Munch, 2008).

However, larp events do not take place in isolation, but rather within a wider context of a community of participants, a social space where authority affects social relations. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed a theory showing how such symbols of authority in the form of symbolic capital structure social space (which he called *Habitus*). Individuals invoke status symbols to gain recognition within a community. To have such symbols is to have symbolic capital. Those who create it enjoy a great deal of prestige within the group. Moreover, since these symbols are authoritative, they are invoked by other members of the group who also seek to emulate them in order to gain some of the recognition associated with them. Thus, status symbols can also be normative in the sense that they encourage the types of practices associated with the symbols as socially appropriate, while discouraging other practices as inappropriate. Therefore, symbolic capital also acts as a force of homogenization within the community. This theory can facilitate the understanding of how authoritative symbols are significant for both the formation of a community as well as the creation of power hierarchies within it.

Language serves an interesting function in the establishment of symbolic capital, as it is a vehicle for its communication. In that sense, language can act as a form of social control in the sense that it is used to enforce “norms of appropriateness” (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 9). Language thus has an important role in “shaping reality, creating patterns of understanding, which people then apply in social practices” (Mayr, 2008, p.5). This makes it a powerful tool for identifying symbolic capital.

When larp events are organized, organizers use language to communicate which practices are emphasized as important, and how the larp should normatively be conducted. These norms are invoked for the purpose of legitimizing the larp and can be transformed into attributes of symbolic capital vested with power. Therefore larp events can be seen as an expression of established community practices. In this way, the event builds

on, and generates, authoritative attributes, which can be revealed through the study of the language the organizers use.

When larp events are organized, organizers use language to communicate which practices are emphasized as important, and how the larp should normatively be conducted.

The purpose of this paper is to locate common authoritative symbols in the larp presentations from two cities, and use Bourdieu’s theory to identify central norms in the material and how they can be significant as a homogenizing force within a larp community. After a discussion on methodology below, the paper starts with a presentation of Bourdieu’s theory. It then goes on to analyze written presentation documents from four larps in each of the two chosen communities: Edmonton, Canada, and Stockholm, Sweden¹. The conclusion of this inquiry discusses the potential implications of authoritative symbols for participants in the larp community and areas for future research.

1.2 Methodology

Edmonton is the capital of the province Alberta in Canada. The metropolitan area has about one million inhabitants. The four larps studied are *Eternium*, *Alliance: Alberta*, *Sovereign* and *Ruritania*, all campaign larps. Stockholm is the national capital of Sweden, with about two million residents in the metropolitan area. The chosen larps are *Frizon*, *Frid I Hernedal*, *Stockholm by Night* and the larps organized under the umbrella of *Lajofabriken*. The first was a stand-alone event taking place over a weekend. The second was part of a longer storyline but only one weekend event was organized during the time of study. The third was a campaign larp where each event formed a part of a longer narrative, and last were regularly scheduled events, staged by separate teams of organizers, yet produced on the same organizational platform, which is why they are treated as affiliated in the analysis below.

The communities have been chosen through the author’s familiarity with them and the local channels of communication, having resided in both, which greatly facilitated locating presentation

¹ All translations from Swedish to English are made by the author.

material about upcoming events. The author has participated in the larp *Sovereign*, and has previous experience of other larps in Edmonton as well, but has, for logistical reasons, not been able to participate in larps in Stockholm since moving to Edmonton in 2005.

Even though larps share the common denominators of participants acting out characters in a fictional setting, there can be differences in the structures, frameworks and forms that larp can take even within a given city. To ensure the validity of the empirical material and that the selected larps are representative for the respective community, they have been chosen from both indoor and outdoor larps to capture a wider range of practices.

Material was collected during the summer of 2010, accessed via Internet. The events commonly had some form of website, sometimes specifically designed for the particular event in question and sometimes through social media like Facebook. Moreover, some websites hosted downloadable pdf-files that included more extensive information about the larp and its framework, or structure for play. Information that is provided to only an individual player or a subgroup of players has not been included.

This study only investigates the language and treatment of larp expressed in the texts published for the respective events and accessible to all players. The task was to identify which practices the writer emphasized as particularly important for the larp, relying on a hermeneutic interpretative analytical approach (Prasad, 2002).

While these interpretations to some extent are inferred from the material, they are validated by grounding in personal experiences (see above) as well as by corroborating those using observations from contemporary larp discourse. For instance, interpretations made here correspond roughly to the Gamist, Dramatist and Immersionist styles of the Three Way Model (Böckman, 2002), which categorizes larp styles based on ethos, discussed extensively within the Nordic larp community (Böckman, 2003; Mäkelä, Koistinen, Siukola and Turunen, 2005; Holter, 2007; Care Boss, 2008).

At heart, this study uses Mill's Most Different System Design to compare the two cases (Ragin, 1987) where different practices are juxtaposed against each other to identify the common social

process at work (Mill, 1973; Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Sartori, 1994), specifically attributes vested with authoritative symbolic capital.

However, symbolic capital can also be expressed through other means, like conversations and actions. It is therefore recognized that this material is not and cannot be fully representative of any of the discussed events without complementary participant observation studies required for capturing such expressions. However, those methods are outside the scope of this paper and will therefore not be discussed.

2. SYMBOLIC CAPITAL BUILDING COMMUNITIES

2.1 Pierre Bourdieu's theory

Capital has traditionally been discussed in terms of material ownership. This has long been acknowledged as significant for structuring social space on the collective level, for instance in terms of the divisions between upper and lower classes. Pierre Bourdieu argued that such structures within communities can be shaped by more than just this dimension. He expanded the definition of capital to include symbolic capital, which is inherently connected to cultural processes (Bourdieu, 1984; Calhoun, 1993; Crossley, 2001).

The acquisition and generation of symbolic capital is deeply intertwined with the forms it can take, which is often a reflection of the social space where it originated. It can manifest in three forms; objectified, embodied and Habitus. The first are physical, such as museums, textbooks or instruments. The second consists of "principles of consciousness in predispositions and propensities and in physical features such as body language, stances, intonation and lifestyle choices" (Moore, 2008, p.105), for instance through behaviour or manners of speech.

The third relates to dispositions and attitudes that are produced through socialization into a particular social space, or Habitus. Bourdieu frames this concept as social position, expressed as social belonging. All individuals who have lived through the same conditions share the same Habitus, and could be said to form a group or a social class in a sociological sense. The shared conditions lead to shared experiences, which, in turn, leads to the adoption of similar attitudes (Crossley, 2001), "understood as a system of

dispositions common to all products of the same conditionings" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.59).

Structures in social space are thus not just a way to describe relative social position, but also "a system of cognitive and motivating structures...procedures to follow, paths to take" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.53). The individual expresses social position as adopted and internalized social reflexes, sometimes on a subconscious level, or, in lay-man's terms, a form of taken-for-granted 'common sense'.

This common sense shapes social perceptions and generates social actions and common practices, which both reproduce the dispositions of the social position but also lead to new and unique expressions informed by it. Within a particular social group, then, *Habitus* serves to generate practices that are considered by the group as 'correct', or as the socially accepted forms of behaviour, guaranteeing "constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.54). Thus, the homogeneity of the shared experiences makes the *Habitus* itself a homogenizing force. Moreover, this set of dispositions is durable, both in the sense that it forms a part of the social construction of the self, and in the sense that it remains transposable between different social fields.

The *Habitus* form of capital, i.e. dispositions and attitudes, consists of particular forms of expertise, the ability to discriminate between genres and periods, in-depth understanding of the 'rules of the game', and the capacity to discriminate between canonical and non-canonical information (Moore, 2008, p.106). It can also be expressed through particular professional attributes, or specialized jargon. Some examples include having gone through "the traditional English public school..., the priesthood or the military or...craft apprenticeship or...the apprenticeship of the artist or, elsewhere, in the cultivation of elite sporting skills or the vocations of the liberal professions" (Moore, 2008, p.111).

Both *Habitus* and embodied capital can be unconscious in nature, akin to adopted social reflexes, and have a corporeal quality, in the sense that they cannot be separated from the individual who carries them. This quality suggests that this form of capital can only be accumulated over time (Moore, 2008, pp.109-110) by internalizing the *Habitus* and its embodied capital through

socialization as a member of a social group. Thus, after an extended period of time, the individual will start manifesting the key symbolic elements of a particular *Habitus* as they are adopted as manners of speech and body language.

Continuing with the example above, the alumni of the prestigious schools will possess more symbolic capital than those who are not. Their diplomas constitute the objectified form of this capital and their manner of speaking constitutes the embodied form of capital, for instance manifested as Oxford English. Finally, attendance becomes a marker of membership in a certain social elite, inaccessible to those who did not attend notwithstanding the potential access to monetary wealth of these others. They are simply not 'Oxford-men', as it were. This membership also changes how they perceive the world around them, a perspective which they share only with other alumni. As this example illustrates, this cultural capital can be used for boundary work (Lamont, 1992; Lamont and Thévenot, 2000), defining who is a member of a group and who is not.

Moreover, it has even been argued that the accumulation of symbolic capital "is identical to the formation of *Habitus*, an integration of mind and body harmoniously adapted to specialized habitats (fields) and transposable beyond them" (Moore, 2008, p.110). In other words, the formation of symbolic capital itself generates a social space intertwined with the form of the symbolic capital.

Symbolic capital can be unequally distributed among the population within any given community. Such inequalities can reflect a difference in the capacity to acquire capital on behalf of the individual (Moore, 2008, p.109), and also differences in the amount of cultural capital an individual has to start with as a function of how much parents can transfer to their children. Thus, parents can choose more or less prestigious schools, enrol children in extra-curricular activities such as arts or sports training and so on (Calhoun, 1993, p.70).

It can therefore be argued that the forms and attributes symbolic capital takes and are invested with is related to power. That is, the holders of prestigious symbolic capital reproduce the attributes that should be considered prestigious within the given field. Thus, the generation of

symbolic capital on an individual level is intrinsically linked with its generation on a collective level, and, in turn, to the production and reproduction of such capital in a community.

This has significance for agency. For individuals, the accumulation of capital facilitates social action, both in terms of capacity to orient and act within a particular field, but also in terms of gaining legitimacy in the eyes of other actors in the same field. Moreover, the agent that can shape the prestigious symbolic capital of a *Habitus* can influence community practices, which also means that this type of capital can become an instrument of domination. The persons who have such capital, manifested as symbols of authority as discussed above, can use them to maintain power. Authoritative symbols, and the language associated with them, can therefore be a key for understanding power relations.

Simultaneously, the transposability of the symbolic capital between different *Habitus* is sometimes limited. An attribute that is considered a mark of high status in one context can, in another, be considered a mark of low status. For example, in some social settings, jewellery known as *bling* would be considered a symbol of power and recognition, but the same piece of jewellery would in other settings be considered vulgar and gauche.

2.2 Bourdieu's theory applied to the field of larp

This theory can be applied to the field of larp. Each larp event can be thought of as a formative event, which creates shared experiences for the participants. As such, they set precedents for how larps can and should be structured when the narrative of those events is told and re-told. When several events employ the same framework of practices, such precedents gradually become entrenched and institutionalized, perhaps even mythologized, as ways to be emulated. Thus, the events, and attributes associated with them, become cultural capital by virtue of their acting as constitutive elements in building the *Habitus* of the larp community. The symbols of successful larps are thus significant forms of cultural capital of the community.

Organizers who want to be perceived as authoritative will be compelled to adopt these symbols to gain legitimacy within the community and attract players. In other words, while some ideas about how to do larp might be implicitly taken for granted by players in general, the

organizer will have to invoke the attributes that are specifically associated with authority and 'good larp' in order to persuade players that they are competent and the experience they offer is worthwhile. In effect, by displaying them and emphasizing them in the presentation material, they show their credentials.

Organizers who want to be perceived as authoritative will be compelled to adopt these symbols to gain legitimacy within the community and attract players.

This illustrates how cultural capital, in the shape of authoritative symbols, constitutes a homogenizing force within the *Habitus*. As they are repeatedly invoked as symbols of authority by new organizers, they become further entrenched, thus, becoming institutionalized required tools for larp.

In the larp community, objectified forms of capital could be props, costuming or books. Embodied capital in the larp community includes the capacity to speak the jargon. *Habitus* forms could be knowledge and distinction between different genres of larp settings, or in-depth knowledge of larp frameworks, like rules or styles.

This has implications for how the role of organizers can be discussed in terms of agenda-setters and authoritative agents within the community. On the one hand, they are constrained by the structures of the *Habitus* in which they operate. Ignoring dominant symbols in their larp presentations could lead to the community discounting the event as illegitimate or 'bad'. Conversely, conforming to, and invoking, the dominant symbols will further entrench them as status symbols in the public consciousness, which might have implications for future organizers.

At the same time, the organizer retains some measure of agency through their prerogative in demonstrating which larp practices participants should adhere to. When acting in this capacity, organizers are agents with the power to exclude players who do not conform to the rules (a power that may or may not be exercised). They also have power to encourage (or even coerce) players into behaving in accordance with them during the individual larp, but also, and more importantly,

with the power to affect the values of the larp community as a whole.

This, in turn, shapes and re-shapes opinions about what type of capital should be considered important by the community, i.e. what the community considers to be the properties of 'good' and 'bad' larps. When a symbol becomes so taken-for-granted that virtually every larp needs to adopt it to come across as legitimate, the effects are arguably particularly salient and potentially constraining. The forms will have a momentum of their own, making it difficult for participants to break with them because of their inherent symbolic value. Players with preferences different from the dominant value system might lack the opportunity to explore alternatives, and organizers can be influenced in terms of what types of larps they can organize and still expect to attract players.

Identifying attributes that organizers emphasize as authoritative, allows a researcher to track such symbols or attributes vested with cultural capital, and when these common denominators are shared by many larps in the same community, an argument can be made that this is an indicator of when they have become a homogenizing force.

Identifying attributes that organizers emphasize as authoritative, allows a researcher to track such symbols or attributes vested with cultural capital, and when these common denominators are shared by many larps in the same community, an argument can be made that this is an indicator of when they have become a homogenizing force.

3. LARP EVENTS IN TWO COMMUNITIES

The following describes the attributes which organizers most commonly have stressed as particularly significant for larps in their presentations in the two cities. The section starts with an account of the Stockholm larps, followed by a description of the Edmonton larps.

3.1 Stockholm larps

The strongest common denominators of the Stockholm larp documents are thematic play and a genre preference for social realist drama, which presentations for all but one larp has stressed, while two larps emphasize an ideal of authenticity.

The former focus on dramatic themes is well illustrated by two events from the *Lajofabriken* platform. One is called *30-års-krisen*, set at a class re-union where all involved are confronted with the issues of increasing age and leaving adolescence behind. Themes include doubts about becoming a parent, deciding on where to settle down or difficult career choices (*30-års-krisen*, 2010). Another is *New Voices in Art*, set at a debutante gallery. This is framed as a humoristic larp where the participants "play version of themselves as promising artists" (*New Voices in Art*). The themes are ambition, falseness and loneliness. Both emphasize a form of kitchen sink realism and the exploration of dramatic themes.

While *Frizon* is not set in everyday life, its presentation material emphasizes the exploration of themes too. The website formulates four concrete thematic questions that the larp revolves around, using the confrontation between love and war, loyalty and fear against the backdrop of a long and exhausting war spanning generations as a dramatic frame (*Frizon*). The organizers turn to the players, saying that they expect "you to...enact the [thematic] questions your role will be confronted with, and actively drive the play of other characters" (*Frizon*). This will be further facilitated through the use of character and story development discussions pre and post-event. Moreover, the character development process is initialized with the organizers providing the players with a "skeletal draft consisting of a number of directional instructions that describe our expectations on the role you will play. It will thus be an assignment to you as a player to build a role that fills a particular function in the dramaturgy of the larp" (*Frizon*).

Even the *Stockholm by Night* Vampire larp discusses the importance of mature themes, including "sex, racism, oppression, dominance/submission and coercion" and that "sensitive subjects in particular will be discussed and vented beforehand" (*Stockholm by Night*), employing the "'cut and 'brake'" (*Stockholm by Night*) safety words, to facilitate the play of scenes that touch

upon sensitive subjects. This is the only larp which clearly deals with the supernatural, and also the only one using an extensive rule-set is, the Mind's Eye Theatre mechanics, which was imported from North America along with the setting. Interestingly enough, the rule-set is not emphasized very much on the website, which is more focused on the above dimensions of dramatic play.

Frid I Hernedal is an exception to the pattern in the absence of discussion on dramatic themes. It is set in a medieval fantasy world and focuses heavily on authenticity, which is continuously stressed by the organizers. They write that their vision is to create the "genuine" simple life in a village, where the organizers are aiming for "quality rather than quantity" (Frid I Hernedal). Examples include the use of steel weapons for the purpose of enhancing atmosphere, and recommendation to bring hand-made leather shoes and medieval looking glasses. Indeed, the website presents a list of costume and prop materials, ranging from excellent to barely acceptable in terms of their appropriateness for the larp. In this context, the behavioural guidelines for how to use steel weapons safely in a combat situation are framed as the rules of the larp.

The *Frizon* larp also makes use of similar framings. For instance, its outdoor setting will have players living in camps and carrying equipment in "military-like exercises that occasionally will be physically and psychologically challenging" (Frizon). This requirement to bring camping equipment for use within the diegesis similarly comes across as aiming to create an authentic setting.

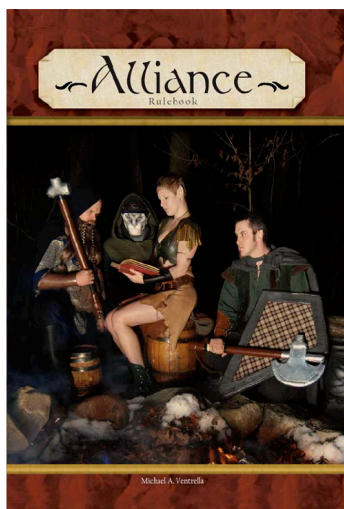


Figure 1: Front cover: Alliance Rulebook

The *Lajvfabriken* website lacks this emphasis on authenticity. Props and costuming are only discussed in terms of how events should not be demanding in this regard so that they can remain easily accessible both new and old participants (Lajvfabriken).

3.2 Edmonton Larps

In sharp contrast to the Stockholm material, all the Edmonton larps deal with the supernatural in some form. *Alliance*, *Sovereign*, and *Eternium* are all placed in Fantasy settings and in *Ruritania*, the players take the roles of powerful wizards in an alternate reality version of the 19th century Europe. The genre seems preferred within the community.

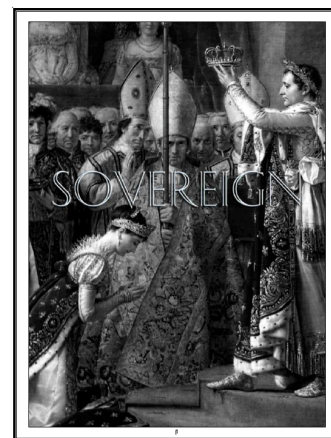


Figure 2 Front cover: Sovereign Rulebook

Another dominant common denominator is the thick rulebook, which is also employed by all larps (see Figures 1-4). This artefact is central in all studied larp presentations, with the *Eternium* (see Figure 4) book being the longest at 292 pages (Darkon Wargaming Club, 2009), and the *Ruritania* rule-set (see Figure 3) being the shortest at 96 pages (Kornelsen and Lam). The elaborate design of the *Alliance* rulebook front cover stands out as an indicator of the artefact's significance (see Figure 1). Indeed, the rule-set can to some extent be considered the vehicle for the larp presentation. That is likely particularly true for *Ruritania* and *Sovereign*, where the organizers also wrote the books (Kornelsen and Lam; *Sovereign*)

The absolute majority of the space in these volumes is devoted to regulatory game mechanics, listing traits, abilities and systems for task resolution that can be used to resolve conflicts between characters. In *Sovereign*, for instance, the rules stipulate that when characters engage in combat with each other,

players take turns to invoke their characters' abilities to determine the outcome. Likewise, special cards are used to invoke traits for social actions, like detecting lies (*Sovereign*). An example of how significant the organizers seem to consider these mechanics is found in the *Alliance* book, where the sneaking skill rule is framed as one of the cardinal principles of the larp, which can only be used with a Marshall present, i.e. a rule-enforcing larp officer (Ventrella, 2008).



Figure 3: Front cover: Ruritania rulebook

All studied Edmonton larps make use of character sheets, experience points, skill checks and other such methods. New players start by generating a character and are given the same starting parameters, though these parameters are given varying labels, for instance packages (Kornelsen and Lam), build points for the first level (Ventrella, 2008), or rank (Darkon Wargaming Club, 2009). *Sovereign* comes across as slightly different, as the organizers design the mechanical aspects of the character, though players are still expected to indicate spheres of character competence for the organizers by ranking these preferences at start (*Sovereign*), suggesting that some form of point system is still in use. These systems ensure that all starting characters have equivalent power levels. Moreover, all these systems of resolution take place outside of the diegesis, i.e. participants need to step out-of-character to implement the rule-set. This use of the term 'rules' differs quite substantially from the game mechanics form employed in the *Frid I Hernedal* material, which regulates activities while keeping the integrity of the diegesis intact.

Again unlike the Stockholm material, authenticity receives very little attention. *Sovereign* stands out as an exception to this rule and comes with a 100 pages long separate setting volume which provides the most extensive information on the history, culture, religion and laws of the setting of any of the studied larps (*Sovereign: Player's Handbook*). It gives players thorough guidance for enacting these and the larp therefore comes across as concerned with authenticity as well as mechanics. However, it is not accompanied with any recommendations on how to embody these cultures through costumes or props. Players are thus left without guidance with regards to how these cultures should be physically brought to life. Indeed, since the cultures are operationalized as quantitative mechanics, it seems more likely that they are primarily thought of as another variable for resolving social actions, like persuasion, by using the rules rather than role-playing.

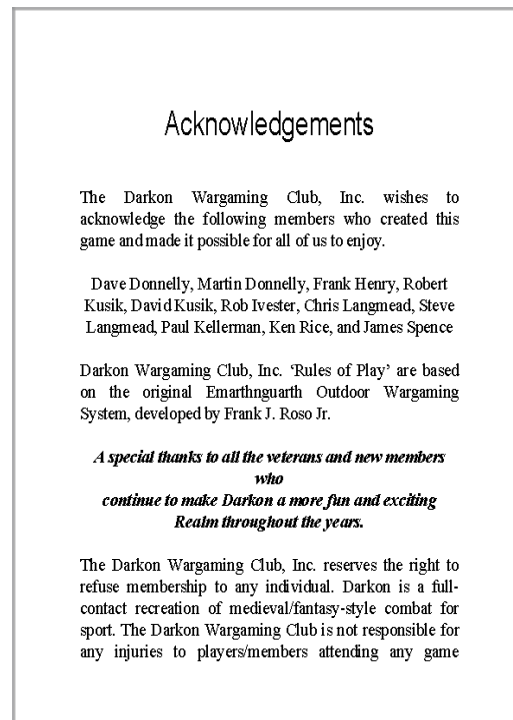


Figure 4 Front cover: Darkon Wargaming Club

Authenticity elements are largely absent in the other larps. The *Alliance* material has five pages of setting information and some passages which emphasize that participants should always stay in character, but this space is still quite limited given the size of the book (Ventrella, 2008). The Darkon rule-book for the *Eternium* larp has only about one page devoted to costuming and the website lacks

notes on this entirely completely (Darkon Wargaming Club, 2009, p.23).

The guidelines for *Ruritania* quite explicitly de-emphasize the importance of costuming and authenticity. For example, it states that an all-black costume will always be accepted, even though the play is set in a fantasy version of 19th century Europe (Kornelsen and Lam), revealing that this is not a primary concern of the organizers.

The material is also quite scarce when it comes to other dimensions of larp, like the exploration of narratives or dramatic themes. *Eternium* and *Sovereign* are devoid of such discussions, and the *Alliance* rule-book even forbids players outright from exploring certain mature themes, like rape, in their character backgrounds (Ventrella, 2008).

Ruritania differs from the others in this regard and contains four pages on techniques for exploring and enhancing drama during role-playing, including cut scenes and dialogue management. The early and prominent position of these techniques in the booklet suggests that the organizers consider drama significant and want to emphasize them (Kornelsen and Lam, pp.5-9).

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview

This comparison brings out a number of interesting observations. The two communities have developed quite different preferences. While two of the Stockholm larps do include fantasy elements in the sense of the supernatural, there seems to be a greater fondness for social realism and drama. In contrast, the Edmonton larp community seems to prefer fantasy larps and all events incorporate some element of this. Larp forms are also clearly divergent (see more on this below). This indicates a divergence with regards to community assumptions about what larps are or should be. It seems clear that the larp communities in Stockholm and Edmonton are distinctly different from each other.

4.2 The authoritative symbolic capital of the Stockholm larp community

The centrality of dramatic themes and authenticity on the Stockholm larp scene suggest that these two attributes are authoritative in that community. Most of the studied larps have some measure of emphasis on the former, and the second is strongly focused *Frid I Hernedal* larp, which relies almost

exclusively on this ideal and also exists to some extent in *Frizon*, with its focus on the authentic refugee experience, but is even more pronounced in the. These two roughly correspond to the Dramatist and Immersionist larp styles of the Three Way Model (Bøckman, 2002).

As symbolic capital, dramatic themes are very much expressed in the Habitus and embodied forms. Knowledge, the capacity for distinction and the embodiment of the role seem to be afforded more authority than objectified forms of capital, like rulebooks or props. As a homogenizing force, it is particularly interesting to discuss in terms of the power relations between the organizers and players.

These two are always involved in a complex power relationship within the role-playing activity. Both actors participate in the definition of the game world, and a range of different ways of managing power between the actors exists between games and even within games (Montola, 2003). As Montola has described, players often have a “decisive power to define the decisions made by a free-willed character construct” (Montola, 2003, p. 24).

However, when the focus lies on exploring the dramatic elements of the narrative defined by a set of themes, there is arguably a shift of power towards the organizers on at least one level. A very explicit example of this was the larp *En Stilla Middag Med Familjen*, where the organizers both reserved the power to define dominant themes for the larp, but also retained the privilege of limiting endogenic player choice during the larp event itself. For instance, when a player chose to leave the scene, an organizer could intervene, almost like a director, and compel the player to return to the scene for purpose of bringing it to its maximum dramatic potential if the exit was judged premature (Hultman, Westerling, and Wrigstad, 2008).

In the Stockholm material, few larps exhibit language indicating that organizers intend to intervene as much as in the above example. Only in the *Frizon* material is there evidence of this type of director style positioning for the organizers. Here, they assume the right to give players the acting cues they judge to be appropriate for illustrating the central themes of the narrative. Even so, the act of defining the central theme for the larp arguably constitutes an exercise of power by the organizers

over the players, since the latter a priori attend an event and act within a framework already established by the former. The act itself could limit the scope of available player actions to at least some extent.

It could be argued that presenting a central theme in the presentation material is significant for the artistic integrity of the larp. As Sandberg writes, "The larp piece only exists in the shared fantasy, which means that the larp is both a mental and physical form of human expression that can only be realised in unity" (Sandberg, 2004, p.275). Thus there are consequences if the vision is not shared on some level, including, in extreme situations, a breakdown of the diegesis itself.

Even so, some players might find avenues for dramatic exploration that the organizers could not anticipate equally fascinating, if not more. They might remain unexplored if the organizers are too interventionist with regards to which themes that should be explored and how.

Organizer fiat can thus constrain the space for the player to explore other themes that a player might find appropriate for the setting and/or the role. In other words, the framework assigns some amount of centralized artistic control to the organizer. In principle, this larp form thus seems to legitimize a measure of the top-down form of organization that can be found in the rule-book framework, albeit without the subtext of mistrust (see below).

The second interesting symbol of authority is authenticity. This form of symbolic capital quite clearly takes the embodied and objectified forms of props, costuming and the ability to appear authentic. As such, it is primarily expressed through visual cues emphasized in the *Frid I Hernedal* presentation, where the organizer's vision was to create the "genuine" simple life in a village (Frid I Hernedal). That language corresponds well to Bøckman's description of the Immersionist style, which is focused on experience the life of the role (Bøckman, 2002). Invoking these practices in larps has been referred to as creating the 360° illusion, which is common in Sweden (Koljonen, 2007).

As a homogenizing force, it has several important implications. First of all, the amount of resources in terms of time and/or money required for preparation can be prohibitive. Second, framing good looking costumes and props as prestigious could favour participants who are talented

craftsmen over those focused on other aspects of larp, like role-playing.

Third, the relations between players and organizers might be different, too. Unlike the director position of the Dramatist organizer, the Immersionist seems to be more like a watchmaker, winding up the larp and then intervening in the actual play as little as possible. This implies a situation where players are given a great deal of freedom in terms of how to act, which suggests an egalitarian ethos.

Fourthly, the focus on visual cues can in itself become a basis for inclusion or, more significantly, exclusion. For instance, *Frid I Hernedal* encourages players with poor eye-sight to either get authentic looking eye-wear or consider playing a role with poor eye-sight if such a prop cannot be acquired (Frid I Hernedal).

It might be interesting for players with disabilities like poor eye-sight to explore what life would be like in a different social and technological setting on occasion. However, if a rigorous interpretation of this type of symbolic capital becomes institutionalized as a community wide minimum standard for larp, these players might either find themselves structurally confined to such roles or even excluded if they lack the capacity to procure the required equipment.

Exclusion, inclusion and discrimination in larps have been discussed in the past within the Swedish larp community. For instance, on one Internet forum, posters discussed how dwarven or elven roles could be made accessible for a diversity of players if organizers observed discretion in how physical traits are used to described these roles. Even so, one poster in that discussion thread argued that "15 year old captains and blond Arabs destroys the illusion" (Svarta Katten), revealing how important these visual cues can be for the role-playing experience of some players.

As it stands, the material for this study does not allow any conclusions about how these issues have been addressed in *Frid I Hernedal* or the community in general, but the presentation texts for this larp certainly seem to make much more rigorous demands for equipment than is the case in any of the Edmonton larps, indicating at least some difference in attitude with regards to how equipment is treated in the two communities.

4.3 The authoritative symbolic capital of the Edmonton larp community

The Edmonton material comes across as more homogenous than the Stockholm material does. The fact that game mechanics have been so ubiquitously adopted suggests that this attribute is authoritative and treated as symbolic capital in its own right for this larp community and even a quite dominant attribute; all larps in this sample, without exception, use it as the basic framework of practice. It corresponds closely to philosophy of the style Bøckman has labelled as Gamist which focuses on scoring points and overcoming challenges (Bøckman, 2002), and has been observed as very common in American larps (Stark, 2012a). Although Canada is a different country, some isomorphism across the border might not be entirely surprising.

This artefact takes all three forms of capital. It is objectified in the sense that it exists, physically, in the form of a rulebook. It has a Habitus form in the sense that knowledge about the rules, or perhaps even more significantly, the capacity to design them, becomes a marker of distinction by virtue of the centrality of the rulebook object itself. Finally, it takes an embodied form in the sense that command of the jargon also is tied to the rule-book.

This attribute could very well be connected to the preference for creating larps involving supernatural elements in the diegesis. Rules might be perceived as an effective intuitive way of managing narrative elements that are possible to generate with special effects in movies but are otherwise challenging to incorporate within a larp narrative.

However, closer scrutiny of how the mechanics are conceptualized within the material shows that they fill a prominent function that go beyond such needs. For instance, there are many rules that exist regardless of the involvement of supernatural elements in the diegesis, like the sneaking rule in *Alliance*. This is given cardinal significance, indicating that it is always implemented, regardless of whether any supernatural ability is involved in the resolution or not. Likewise, in both *Sovereign* and *Alliance*, players are required to use character sheets irrespective of their characters' ability to use supernatural powers, and *Sovereign* employs rules for solving common social interactions, like persuasion (*Sovereign*).

The *Alliance* rule-book states that Alliance larps are "all about role-playing" (Ventrella, 2008, p.13), suggesting that rules might be a question of simulation. However, the rule-set also stipulates that all characters, even older and arguably more experienced ones, are given the same starting conditions. This indicates that it actually acts as symbols of fair play.

Indeed, the player is explicitly asked to provide a rationale for why an aged character starts on level one in the background write-up:

"If your character is older, you may have to think of a reason why your character is only first level. Perhaps you have been a farmer or a trapper for many years and now you have been kicked out of the family / mistreated by an evil bad guy / stirred into action by some injustice and have decided to become an adventurer. Or maybe you just never liked to study" (Ventrella, 2008, p 14).

The character backgrounds are thus confined by the mechanics, where some character choices are treated as a priori unacceptable, rather than using the mechanics to become an expression of the character. In the text, the mechanics take precedence over role-playing freedom, a strong indication that the rules are primarily a tool for fairness. In her discussion on American larp culture, Stark similarly concludes that quantitative mechanics reflect an ideal of equal opportunity (Stark, L., 2012a).

However, rule-books and game mechanics transformed into a homogenizing form of cultural capital in the community could have interesting implications for practices within the Habitus.

First of all, the rules rely heavily on quantitative mechanics to regulate player behaviour, implying a need to do so. The suggestion is that organizers should expect that players will actively try to cheat or otherwise act to gain an unfair advantage in a manner that is detrimental to the event in some respect. The rule-set then constitutes a way to discourage such behaviour, empowering organizers with control over player activities to ascertain that their actions do not violate the rules, for instance by requiring a Marshall for resolution of certain tasks, as done in *Alliance*. The organizer

is thus positioned to act as a referee, adjudicating the implementation of the mechanics, but also being omnipresent during the actual play in order to police the larp to ensure compliance with the rules. This sends a strong signal that players cannot be depended upon to act without supervision. The rationale for using rules is thus that players cannot be trusted. Consequently, the rule-book represents a philosophy of mistrust in the players.

Secondly, while the mechanics ostensibly symbolize fair play, it is far from clear that their implementation will actually result in fairness. The quantitative nature of these mechanics in itself encourages certain types of players while discouraging others. Those who are interested in such quantitative exercises and those who have concentrated on gaining a good grasp of the quantitative rule-set will tend to be advantaged when it comes to task resolution over those who do not care about rules or those who simply do not have an affinity for mathematics. The framework will therefore favour players who act in a manner that optimizes the outcomes enforced by the rules in order to win the challenge, a behaviour colloquially known as “min-maxing”. Thus, since the quantitative nature of the framework favours one type of player over others, the fairness ideal itself ultimately becomes something of an illusion.

Thirdly, organizers seem expected to be able to produce, or at least adopt, an encompassing rule-book to be perceived as legitimate. This means that a good deal of time will be directed towards either creating the rule-set and writing it, which, with a book of hundreds of pages, like the ones used in Edmonton, constitutes a considerable effort on the part of the organizers, but likely results in a great deal of prestige within the community. Even if the organizers adopt a pre-written rule-set, like in *Alliance*, there is still the time and effort that players and organizers need to devote to assign mechanics to their characters and policing player behaviour to make sure that it complies with the rules.

Fourthly, implementing the mechanics always take place outside the diegesis. As such, the rules as an authority constitute a significant institutionalized driver requiring the participants to engage in exogenic practices to engage with them. In other words, if players are faced with a conflict between characters, they have to stop roleplaying and step out of character, maybe to check character sheets or

calling on an organizer to mediate, to be able to implement the game mechanics for the purpose of resolving that conflict. Only by ignoring the rules can they solve such situations within the diegesis, without stepping out of character. The mechanics themselves thus compel players to shift their focus from building the diegetic continuum to regulating it. This could impede creative player cooperation within the diegesis, even as the ideal of fairness invoked by the symbol is not actually achieved.

Finally, in organizational theory, rule-boundedness and mistrust are integral to strong top-down organizational power structures (Hood, 2000). In terms of larp, this could manifest through players feeling compelled to act within the confines of the rule-set, or being encouraged to act in certain way to satisfy the rule-set, as in the case of character generation in *Alliance* discussed above. Together, these basic principles are inherently disempowering and obstruct bottoms-up impulses.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This text has discussed the significance of symbolic capital for larp events and larp communities.

The two communities emphasize different forms and manifestations of symbolic capital. Indeed, it can be argued that the Edmonton and Stockholm larp communities form different Habiti. As such, participants introduced to larp in these two different locales are likely to be socialized into different ways of doing larps, emphasizing different symbols or attributes as necessary, or important, for doing larp. In Edmonton, the rulebook would probably be seen as a necessity for a ‘good’ larp, and the more all-inclusive the mechanics, the better. In Stockholm, this symbol is largely absent and it is more likely that a player would focus on authentic props or the exploration dramatic themes as a key symbol of larp.

Indeed, it can be argued that the Edmonton and Stockholm larp communities form different Habiti.

Even so, as can be seen in the material organizers in the two communities have been exposed to similar ideas about larp forms to at least some extent. Thus, presentations in both communities reflect over how to frame rules, the exploration of narratives, or how to address costuming and

props, which ultimately concerns issues of authenticity.

However, as Bourdieu notes, an attribute can be vested with symbolic capital in one context but considered a sign of the lack of distinction in another. The material in this study indicates that game mechanics are an authoritative symbol in Edmonton, much less so in Stockholm.

The symbolic capital invoked through language can act as a labelling mechanism, allowing players to easily identify which events they would enjoy participating in. However, this argument is only valid if the community has a variety of events to choose from. In a community where the same playing styles, genre or themes are dominant, the choice remains limited.

Some interesting questions arise from these observations. First of all, the dominance of the mechanics symbol in the Edmonton community leaves the question of how this affects players who do not care much for it. Its pervasiveness suggests that they lack the opportunity to explore alternative forms of larp. Are players even aware that alternatives exist at all?

Moreover, to what extent do larps become socially constructed as 'good' or 'bad' based on the authoritative symbols invoked by the organizers and/or players? To what extent should these symbols be guiding for either actor within a larp? Is it even possible to decouple these authoritative attributes, as forms of symbolic capital, from the aesthetic requirements of different larp forms? For instance, in Edmonton, all the larps use character sheets, which seem like an insignificant tool in Stockholm. Does this affect how characters or roles are described by organizers and players? Does it affect acting practices?

In an interesting study of social interactions in MMORPGs, Myers argued that breaking entrenched social rules can have serious consequences for the maintenance of social relationships. He had his character, Twixt, behave strictly according to coded rules, regardless of the prevailing social norms that players had created beyond those embedded in the computer games' programming. This provoked severe reactions from other players in the community, and eventually to Myers' exclusion from it (Myers, 2008). The study gives reason to ask if ostracism could become a problem within larp communities, too, when a

particular form of symbolic capital is so dominant as to be considered a necessary attribute for the larp event.

For example, how would a community react to an organizer coming from a larp Habitus which emphasizes radically different forms of symbolic capital organizing a larp invoking that of the place of origin? How would the Stockholm community react to an Edmonton organizer trying to set up an event where the game mechanics take centre stage, or how would the Edmonton community react to a Stockholm larper trying to organize a larp that invokes the attributes of dramatic exploration and authenticity, or decides to ignore the aforementioned characters sheet as a larp tool? Would the organizer be able to attract players or would they experience a fate similar to that of Twixt?

This text has only ventured to explore the presentation material of the studied events, which leaves a rather large realm outside the scope of the inquiry. For instance, how significant are other forms of symbolic capital, like venues, colloquialisms and body language, for building cultural capital within the community?

Likewise, to what extent do players actually behave according to the vision or style set out by the organizers? For instance, do players actively try to explore the themes an organizer wants to focus on? Will demands on authenticity result in players acting realistically for the setting? Do players actually take out the character sheets and use social traits to resolve a conversation between characters as stipulated by the rule-book? Other methodologies, such as participant observation, would be especially useful for answering these kinds of questions.

This paper has the city as the chosen field of study, but since only written presentations have been studied, little can be said about to what extent the two communities are internally homogenous. It is possible that a single city could contain more than one community of larpers, depending on how social networking functions among larpers. The question of how wide a larp community can become remains unanswered here.

Finally, how do particular manifestations of symbolic capital, like the rule-set, spread across time and space and between communities? More to the point, why did practices evolve so differently in

Edmonton and Stockholm? The significance of cultural capital as a homogenizing force in terms of how it compels key actors to reproduce its key attributes has already been noted. The material suggests that at some point after having adopted larp as a practice, Stockholm organizers started to emphasize dramatic narrative and authenticity as symbols of good larps, which never seems to have been the case in Edmonton. Finding explanations for this could be the subject of historical studies of the development of the different larp communities.

Though speculative at best, if this author were to conduct such a study, it could start with the hypothesis that prime gatekeepers in the Stockholm community might have had educational backgrounds in the arts or humanities, which could explain why the quantitative form of larp practice might have had less salience there. Stark's account for the Knudepunkt, the yearly Nordic larp convention hints at this. She underscores how the participants were different from their North American counterparts: "They were still geeks, but geeks of a different breed – art geeks" (Stark, 2012b, p.211) and then goes on to describe their fashions and jargon, i.e. their embodied cultural capital, in some detail, including a note on the potential difference in average educational level. To some extent, her observations seem to corroborate the Bourdieuan analysis made here, in terms of how communities adopt different cultural attributes as symbols of prestige.

It is entirely possible that the different Habiti, once established, encourage different types of people to step into the role of gatekeeper and steward of the larp culture. In the North American context, writing elaborate game mechanics is prestigious. This would attract persons with an affinity for quantification, such as those who are adept with math, physics or engineering. The Nordic avant-garde scene, on the other hand, would be more likely attract people with a background in the Arts.

A reason that the impulses from the Nordic countries have not travelled back across the Atlantic may be related to larps being embodied storytelling in the sense that all participants have to be physically present in the setting where the narrative is created. Once practices in the Nordic countries started diverging from those of North America into what is today known as the avant-garde Nordic larp scene, the distance involved

would be an obstruction to the travel of ideas and practices across the Atlantic Ocean.

These questions suggest some avenues for future research. Such efforts can draw upon Bourdieu's framework and explore these hypotheses to explore several potential causes (Griswold, 1987) to find answers as to how practices have developed in the larp communities.

6. REFERENCES

- (1) 30-års-krisen. Available at: <<http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=133482126677751>> [Accessed August 30, 2010]
- (2) Bourdieu, P., 1977. *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press.
- (3) Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- (4) Bourdieu, P., 1990. *The logic of practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- (5) Bøckman, P., 2002. *The three way model: revision of the threefold model for scandinavian LARP*. Available at: <http://www.darkshire.net/jhkim/rpg/theory/threefold/faq_larp.html> [Accessed June 29, 2012].
- (6) Bøckman, P., 2003. Dictionary. In: M. Gade, L. Thorup, and M. Sander, eds. *As larp grows up: The Book from Knudepunkt 2003*. Fredriksberg: Projektgruppen KP03.
- (7) Calhoun, C., 1993. Habitus, Field, and Capital: The Question of Historical Specificity. In: C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma and M. Postone eds. *Bourdieu: Critical perspectives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (8) Care Boss, E., 2008. Key concepts in forge theory. In: M. Montola, and J. Steenros, eds. *Playground worlds: Creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*, Helsinki: Ropecon, ry.
- (9) Crossley, N., 2001. The phenomenological habitus and its construction, *Theory and Society*, 30 (1), pp.81-120.
- (10) Darkon Wargaming Club, n.d. *Darkon Camp Site Policy* [online], Available at: <<http://www.darkon.org/campout.html>> [Accessed July 30 2010].

- (11) Darkon Wargaming Club, 2009. *Darkon Rulebook*. [pdf] s.l. Available at: <<http://www.darkon.org/rules.html>> [Accessed July 30 2010].
- (12) van Dijk, T. A., 2008. *Discourse and power*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- (13) Edwards, R. 2001. *GNS and other matters of role-playing theory*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.indie-rpgs.com/articles/1/>> [Accessed: September 26 2010].
- (14) Frid I Hernedal, [online] Available at: <<http://tulajv.se/hernedal/2010/07/14/valkommen-till-frid-i-hernedal/>> [Accessed Aug 2 2010].
- (15) Frizon, [online] Available at: <<http://frizon.armyr.se/wordpress/till-dig-som-deltagare>> [Accessed: Aug 24 2010].
- (16) Griswold, W., 1987. A methodological framework for the sociology of culture. *Sociological methodology*, 17 pp.1-35.
- (17) Hood, C., 2000. *The Art of the state*. Oxford: Clarendon
- (18) Holter, M., 2007. Stop saying immersion. In: J. Donnis, M. Gade, and L. Thorup, eds. *Lifelike*, Copenhagen: Arco Grafisk.
- (19) Hultman, A., Westerling, A. and Wrigstad, T., 2008. Behind the façade of A nice evening with the family. In: M. Montola, and J. Steenros, eds. *Playground worlds: Creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*, Helsinki: Ropecon, ry.
- (20) Koljonen, J., 2007. Eye-witness to the illusion: An essay on the impossibility of 360° role-playing. In: J. Donnis, M. Gade, and L. Thorup, eds. *Lifelike*, Copenhagen: Projektgruppen KP07,
- (21) Kornelsen, L and Lam, K, n.d., *Ruritania*, [pdf] Available at: <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=vandpid=explorerandchrome=trueandsrcid=0B3iG4NliYX7JZDE0NzE5MjEtNDY4MC00NmU2LWIxMDMtZTk2YmI3NzdINDVlandhl=en_US> [Accessed: July 19 2010].
- (22) Lajvfabriken, [online] Available at: <<http://lajvfabriken.se/vadarlajvfabriken>> [Accessed August 30 2010].
- (23) Lamont, M., 1992. *Money, morals and manners: The culture of the French and the American upper middle class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (24) Lamont, M., and Thévenot, L., eds., 2000. *Rethinking comparative cultural sociology. Repertoires of evaluation in France and the United States*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- (25) Mackay, D. 2001. *The fantasy role-playing game: A new performing art*. Jefferson: McFarland and Co.
- (26) Mayr, A., 2008. *Language and power: An introduction to institutional discourse*. London: Continuum.
- (27) Mill, J. S., 1973. *A system of logic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- (28) Montola, M., 2003. Role-playing as interactive construction of subjective diegesis. In: M. Gade, L. Thorup, and M. Sander, eds. *As larp grows up: The book from Knudepunkt 2003*, Fredriksberg: Projektgruppen KP03.
- (29) Montola, M., 2007. Breaking the invisible rules: Borderline role-playing. In: J. Donnis, M. Gade, and L. Thorup, eds. *Lifelike*, Copenhagen: Projektgruppen KP07.
- (30) Montola, M., 2008 The invisible rules of role-playing: The social framework of the role-playing process. *International Journal of Role-Playing*, (1).
- (31) Moore, R. 2008. Capital. In: M. Grenfell ed. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts*, Stocksfield: Acumen.
- (32) Myers, D. 2008. Play and punishment: The sad and curious case of Twixt. In: *Proceeding of the [player] conference*. August 2008: s.l., IT University of Copenhagen.
- (33) Mäkelä, E, Koistinen, Siukola, and Turunen, 2005. The process model of role-playing. In: P. Bøckman, and R. Hutchinson, eds. *Dissecting larp: Collected papers for Knutepunkt 2005*, Oslo: Norsk Kulturråd.
- (34) New Voices in Art [online], Available at: <<https://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?formkey=dENOV1NoTHZjc3JEbDRyMUROOVIIU1E6MQ>> [Accessed August 30 2010].
- (35) Pedersen, B, and Munch, L, 2008. Walking the white road: A trip into the hobo dream. In: M. Montola, and J. Steenros, eds. *Playground worlds: Creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*, Helsinki: Ropecon, ry.

- (36) Pettersson, J., 2006, The Art of Experience. In: T. Fritzson, and T. Wrigstad, eds. *Role, play, art: Collected experiences of role-playing*, Stockholm: Föreningen Knutpunkt.
- (37) Prasad, A., 2002. The Contest over meaning: Hermeneutics as an interpretive methodology for understanding texts. *Organizational Research Methods*, 5 (1) pp.12-33
- (38) Przeworski, A., and Teune, H., 1970. *The logic of comparative social inquiry*. New York: Wiley-Interscience.
- (39) Ragin, C. C., 1987. *The comparative method: Moving beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.
- (40) Sandberg, C., 2004. Genesi: Larp Art, Basic Theories. In: M. Montola, and J. Stenroos, eds. *Beyond role and play: Tools, toys and theory for harnessing the imagination*, Helsinki: Ropecon, ry.
- (41) Sartori, G., 1994. Compare why and how: Comparing, miscomparing and the comparative method. In: M. Dogan, and A. Kazangil, eds., *Comparing nations*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- (42) s.n., n.d, *Sovereign*. [pdf] s.l.
- (43) s.n., n.d., *Sovereign: Player Handbook* [pdf]. s.l.
- (44) Stark, L., 2012a. We hold these rules to be self-evident: Larp as a metaphor for American identity. In: J. Petterson, ed. *States of play: Nordic larp around the world*, s.l.: Pohjoismaisen roolipelaamisen seura
- (45) Stark, L., 2012b. *Leaving Mundania: Inside the transformative world of live action-roleplaying games*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
- (46) Stenroos, J., and Hakkarainen, H., 2003. The Meilahti school: Thoughts on role-playing. In: M. Gade, L. Thorup, and M. Sander, eds. *As larp grows up: The book from Knutepunkt 2003*, Fredriksberg: Projektgruppen KP03
- (47) Stockholm by Night [online], Available at: <<http://camarilla.se/>> [Accessed Aug 27 2010].
- (48) Svanevik, M. 2005. The collective's little red book. In: P. Bøckman, and R. Hutchinson, eds. *Dissecting larp: Collected papers for Knutepunkt 2005*, Oslo: Norsk Kulturråd.
- (49) Svarta Katten [online] Available at: <<http://www.svartakatten.com/forum/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=1531&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=60>> [Accessed December 18 2011].
- (50) Ventrella, M. A., 2008. *Alliance: Live action role playing*. Markham: Double Dragon.

Mikael Hellstrom is born and raised in Stockholm, Sweden, where he started larping in 1992. Currently, he is a Ph.D. Candidate at the department of political science of the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, Alberta, where he moved in 2005. His research focuses on ethnic relations and multiculturalism, investigating the intersection between civil society and public administration. The forthcoming thesis compares immigrant community mobilization on labour market issues in Canada and Sweden, drawing heavily on the theories of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

The self-perceived effects of the role-playing hobby on personal development – a survey report

Popular - This article is a survey report of a study conducted between 2010 and 2011 exploring the views of role-playing gamers on how the role-playing hobby has influenced their social and mental development. A socio-pedagogical concept of empathic intelligence was chosen as the theoretical framework based on which a survey questionnaire of nine groups of questions was built. The survey that included both multiple-choice questions and open questions was taken by 161 Finnish active role-players and statistically analyzed. A control group of 106 non-role-players was used to examine the role-players' self-assessment of their own capabilities.

The study showed that the views of role-playing gamers on their hobby and themselves are predominantly positive. The respondents reported that role-playing games had provided them with a good platform for experimenting with different personalities and social roles, and that they viewed the hobby as having improved various skills and traits such as creativity and imagination. The gender of the respondents was an important factor especially regarding the emotional responses evoked by the games, while the other variables played a minor role.

Role-players viewed themselves as more imaginative but less socially adept than the control group. A more active reading hobby was perceived by the role-players as well.

The results of the study suggest that the role-playing gaming hobby provides a good platform for the development of both personal and social skills, and that used correctly, role-playing games have the potential to be used to advance such development.

Keywords: role-playing games, imagination, empathy, empathic intelligence, self-assessment, hobby communities

Mikko Meriläinen
University of Helsinki
Finland
mikko.merilainen@helsinki.fi

1. INTRODUCTION

Role-playing gamers have often been viewed in mainstream culture through negative stereotypes (Curran 2011) such as lacking in social skills (Bowman 2010, Leppälahti 2002). While role-players themselves have often jokingly embraced

such stereotypes, it is undeniable that despite positive development in recent years, role-playing games still carry a burden of years of uninformed negative portrayal in popular media (Curran 2011).

However, role-playing games seemingly incorporate several key elements that would

suggest their potential for positive human development. Role-players form tight social networks (Leppälähti 2002, Piippo 2010), role-playing has successfully been used as a teaching tool (Hyltoft 2008, Karwowski & Soszynski 2008) and by their very nature role-playing games encourage experimentation with different social roles and personality types, as well as the development of imagination. Personal experience from years of role-playing underlined the conflict between the stereotype and the seemingly positive impact of the hobby, leading to this study.

The study undertaken sought to examine the views of active role-players on various aspects of their hobby and compare those views to Arnold's theory of empathic intelligence – a socio-pedagogical concept of healthy mental and social conduct – in order to find out whether the positive influence of role-playing was widely perceived by active role-players, and whether variables such as age, sex, or hobby experience influenced these views. The research questions were posed as follows:

- 1) What level of connection does there exist between the role-playing hobby and empathic intelligence as defined by Arnold?
- 2) How do differences in age, sex and hobby experience show in role-players' views on their hobby?

On the first question it was hypothesized that a perceivable positive connection existed. The hypothesis was based on personal views and experiences that suggested an existing connection between the various elements of the empathic intelligence theory. Due to the exploratory nature of the second question, no hypothesis was posited.

The study was conducted in November 2010 as an anonymous quantitative survey using the University of Helsinki's e-form platform. The intention was to assemble a large amount of data in a fairly short time period, as well as add quantitative research to a field mostly dominated by qualitative methods. Due to the nature of the studied phenomenon, a mixed method combining open questions with statistical analysis was chosen, which brought with it some challenges, but also provided its own strengths. Previous research has shown the usefulness of qualitative methods in the study of role-playing games and role-players, but they can be very time-consuming and thus limit the samples gathered. There is also the problem of

possibly very limited generalisation (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004). Quantitative methods have been used less, but also have their uses, especially in gathering larger data samples. To leave out either aspect would in the researcher's view have severely weakened the research. As Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004, 21) state, qualitative and quantitative research used together produce more complete knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice. Arnold (2005, 132-133) explicitly states that both quantitative and qualitative methods have a place in empathic intelligence research.

Role-players have been studied previously with mixed results, with the research often suffering from small and biased samples (Curran 2011, Leppälähti 2002). The aim of the current study was to utilize a survey method to reach a more balanced group of respondents, which proved successful. At 161 role-players answering the questionnaire, the study has to the author's knowledge one of the largest samples in role-playing research to date. This is mainly due to most researchers employing qualitative methods such as ethnographies and interviews (for example Bowman 2010, Leppälähti 2002, Piippo 2010), in which the samples are smaller but investigated in much more detail.

The study was completed in the University of Helsinki's faculty of education, and was thus also intended to provide scientific grounds to be used when mapping the potential of role-playing as an educational method and tool. This seconded using a socio-pedagogical concept, in this case empathic intelligence, as the foundation of the study's theoretical framework. As discussed later, this presented a major challenge in terms of quantifiability, but was held on to in an effort to bridge the gap between the qualitative and the quantitative – a paradigm that can be seen as crucial in the study of a phenomenon as diverse as role-playing.

Using an online survey, the study sought to gather a wide range of opinions and self-assessments from the respondents in an attempt to find out what they viewed as the beneficial and detrimental effects of the role-playing hobby. In addition to answering the main research question – what kind of potential role-playing games hold for personality development – the survey was also designed to accumulate data to fuel and guide further research. To alleviate some of the problems inherent in self-

assessment, a control group was used in one of the sections of the research.

This article describes the study undertaken. First, the theoretical framework in which the study is set is described, focusing on noted and potential roles of role-playing in the context of Arnold's concept of empathic intelligence. The research method and the choices leading to it are then discussed in the next section, as is the relationship between the two and the survey form itself. In the section the the reliability and validity of the study is investigated, and its strengths and weaknesses reviewed. The next section deals with what are viewed as the most relevant and notable results of the study. These results and their implications are then discussed and conclusions drawn in the final two sections.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In her 2005 book *Empathic Intelligence* Roslyn Arnold describes empathic intelligence as an ability to utilize different forms of intelligence and sensitivity to effectively function with other people. Key concepts are combining cognitive and affective experiences as well as the effective utilization of imagination to place oneself in a larger frame of reference regarding other people and the world. While Arnold's theory was primarily written with the fields of education and business in mind, it was considered in this study to be suitable for a more general view of interpersonal relations as well. It must be noted that despite the name of the theory, it's not as such a psychometric theory of intelligence comparable for instance to the different types intelligences presented by Goleman (1995) or Gardner (1983). Rather than a cognitive theory, Arnold's theory is more one of social practice, with a strong ethical and ideological element. Arnold explicitly states that empathic intelligence as a concept is an outcome of liberal, democratic, student-centred educational philosophy (Arnold 2004). Due to this, the study should primarily be seen from the viewpoint of education and the social sciences, rather than psychology or cognitive science. The nature of the theory also sets the theory's position in relation to the study. While Arnold's theory of empathic intelligence served as an important element of the study, its most important function was to provide inspiration and a viewpoint into a complex phenomenon. This was largely due to the difficulties inherent in measuring several concepts

in Arnold's theory, somewhat limiting its use as a foundation for the whole study.

Since a universally accepted theory of role-playing is yet to emerge, the conscious decision was made to narrow the scope of the study down to role-playing as the term is used in everyday language, pertaining specifically to role-playing games. This encompasses traditional tabletop role-playing, live action role-playing as well as so-called freeform gaming, which incorporates elements from the two. The definition means the exclusion of several activities that share similarities with role-playing games, such as improvisational theatre, psychodrama and historical re-enactment. Such activities can be viewed as forms of role-playing, but not as role-playing games (Harviainen 2010). In this study further exploration of the exact differences of role-playing and role-playing games was deemed unnecessary. Participants were made aware of the meaning of the term "role-playing" in the context of the study.

Arnold (2004, 13) defines empathy as "an ability to understand the thoughts and feelings of self and others. [It is] a sophisticated ability involving attunement, decentering and introspection: an act of thoughtful, heartfelt imagination". This definition appears indicative of the way Arnold attempts to combine the psychological with the social in her theory. It resembles those of Rogers (1975) and Goleman (1995) who also see empathy as a very complex phenomenon with both social and mental elements. This is markedly different from for example Eisenberg & Strayer (1987, 5) who simply define empathy as an emotional response. Arnold (2004, 16-17) also points out the difference between empathy and sympathy. She views the former as a far more intricate process than the latter, which merely involves recognizing and sharing similar experiences and relating to another person through them.

Most of the elements that Arnold views as being conducive to the development of empathic intelligence can be found in role-playing games. Below are outlined the most important links between the two.

Arnold emphasizes the importance of narratives, by which she means both written and orally transferred stories, including but not limited to literature, everyday personal stories, games and folklore. She suggests that such experiences increase the viewers capacity for empathy, creativity and imagination and evoke both playful

and ethical speculation. (Arnold 2005.) Bettelheim (1991) and Talib (2002) note that narratives help in the structuring of a developing emotional life and promote self-knowledge and a deeper understanding of one's own life. Regardless of whether a person views or creates the narrative, narratives can help in achieving a wider view of the world. There is also a natural relationship between narratives and empathy: at the heart of experiencing a story is the ability to position oneself in a world created by another. (Arnold 2005.)

The connection between narratives and role-playing is an obvious one. While role-playing is technically not a narrative in a theoretical sense (as it lacks a narrator and a listener) (Heliö 2004), it nevertheless includes characters, events and narrative elements which allow it to be seen as a narrative in the sense in which Arnold uses the term. The nature of role-playing games is suitable for creating story-like structures and the games are often specifically designed to promote this (Pettersson 2005). The goal of role-playing games is often to provide the players with a narrative experience or interpretation of in-game events, and game sessions are often viewed and processed afterwards in story form (Heliö 2004). This creates stories that function in the way Arnold describes, in that they fuel imagination and provide new thoughts to consider. As with other stories, the story created from a game can be interpreted in a multitude of ways, depending on the people describing, experiencing and interpreting the events (Lehrskov 2007). According to Arnold narratives are what allows people to assume different roles, and she mentions children's pretend play as an example. The act of taking roles is an essential part of the human psyche (Bowman 2010) and is a constant element in human interaction (Goffman 1959). Drama educators Luostarinen (1995) and Toivanen (in press) state that the process of trying on different roles allows the layering and reflection of two realities - the everyday and the fictional - and thus promotes the exploration of the self.

However, perhaps the most important connection between role-playing and the narratives described by Arnold is the reason people engage in them. As Flood (2006, 40) puts it:

Role-playing games allow the participants to escape from the conflict, frustrations, disappointments, stresses, and the various

other minor horrors of daily life. It is the doorway through which another world can be reached. A world in which anything is possible and the unsolvable can be solved.

This view is very similar to Arnold's view of speculative thought, using one's imagination to cross the borders of the known, as the peak of cognitive development (Arnold 2005). According to Lieberoth (2006) role-playing has no reality or essence in itself, but instead the role-playing experience exists only in the imaginations of the participants. Montola (2008) mentions an imaginary world as a uniting factor in all role-playing games. Whether live action or tabletop, it can well be said that role-playing cannot exist without imagination, which is always a (if not the most) significant element in a game. Imagination provides the whole process of role-playing with a meaning and makes it possible.

The connection between narratives and role-playing is an obvious one.

Discussing drama Leiber (1995) suggests that it is possible to practice empathy skills by assuming the identity of a character by identifying with them and experiencing their life. This is referred to as *immersion*. While the exact definition and use of the term is debated (see Holter 2007, Lappi 2007), the phenomenon is often described when discussing role-playing games (Choy 2004, Flood 2006, Hopeametsä 2008 to mention a few examples). This ability to immerse oneself in a fantasy is cited by Arnold (2005) to be a prerequisite for empathy. Assuming the role of a role-playing game character, the player in a way becomes the character, for example commonly talking as and about the character from a first person perspective. This suggests a connection to the character more empathic than sympathetic in nature: instead of actively comparing their feelings to those of their character, the player's feelings often merge with the imaginary ones of the character, producing a vicarious experience.

In a wider context, Arnold notes the importance of art in cultivating empathic intelligence. Different forms of art not only allow a person to acquaint themselves with a great variety of feelings, thoughts and ways of acting, but also make it possible to better adjust, express and understand one's values, thoughts and feelings. As Arnold sees

it, quality art in its different forms raises important, profound questions in the reflective mind. Arnold talks about *reading* a work of art, further tying it into the narratives described above. (Arnold 2005.) The question of whether games can be classed as art is a complex one and far beyond the scope of this paper. Video games have been examined from an art point of view (Smuts 2005) and their cultural status has been compared to that of early cinema (Jenkins 2005). J. Tuomas Harviainen (2010) claims that the fact that role-playing games are games does not rule out their potential for being art as well. Jaakko Stenros posits that role-playing has the potential to be art, but while some role-playing games can provide the player with experiences similar to those elicited by art, it does not as a whole fit into the frames of traditional art (Stenros 2010). In the context of empathic intelligence Stenros' comment becomes very relevant, since Arnold focuses especially on the viewer's reactions to a piece of art, instead of the piece in itself. Due to the dual nature of a role-player as both an actor and an observer, these reactions may even be more intense and fruitful in terms of reflection than those elicited when interacting with a static piece of art such as reading a book or watching a play. Whereas in traditional narrative arts the narrator often explicates this inner life to the viewer, this is not necessarily required in role-playing games. Instead, depending on the game and the player it is possible that the player is the sole author of their character's thoughts and feelings (Kim 2004).

This focus on reflection is another aspect apparently tying empathic intelligence and role-playing together. The dynamic, interactive nature of the games enables the player to constantly reflect on both in-game and off-game happenings and adjust themselves in relation to the game world, the other characters and the other players. The character's identity is also consciously developed not only by the player, but by the entire group as well (Bowman 2010). As mentioned above in discussing narratives, the game events and experiences are often reflected on and analyzed afterwards. This is especially true with mentally straining games (Hopeametsä 2008, Montola 2010) and educational role-play, both in which a post-game debriefing session is usually seen as near mandatory.

As a final positive link there is the importance of a supportive community. Arnold (2005) notes the importance of positive communities as paramount in the development of empathic intelligence and

vice versa. The shared enthusiasm and engagement and shared narratives contained in the concept of empathic intelligence help promote the development of like-minded communities, while the communities in turn help develop the elements conducive to their formation. It's typical for people to join communities with shared interests and views, and our membership in different communities is an important way of defining ourselves. (Arnold 2005.) According to Allan (1989) not only are friendships and social interaction in themselves important elements in building a healthy identity, but also that a tightly-knit social group allows us to break free from our everyday social roles, and thus helps reinforce our personal identity. Role-playing itself is made out of social interaction, and scenarios are often about teamwork, as the players have to work together in order to maintain a safe shared fictional environment (Bowman 2010).

According amongst others to Fine (1983) and Müller (2011), the role-playing community can be seen as a subculture. Role-players often share similar interests such as certain forms of pop culture (Mackay 2001), which combines with participation in a fairly marginal hobby activity, the use of specialized jargon and humour drawn from a shared cultural context to further strengthen feelings of belonging and community (Leppälahti 2002). Lehigh notes that role-playing games create a social space of their own. In this space there arise new social groups whose primary frame of reference is that of the game world as opposed to the outside world. In this environment people who find it hard to deal with everyday mainstream culture may experience feelings of accomplishment and liberation (Lehigh 2005).

Arnold specifically notes the importance of rituals such as funerals and graduations in providing and strengthening feelings of community and lessening the fear of solitariness (Arnold 2005). The similarities between role-playing and ritual activity have been brought up by many authors (e.g. Bowman 2010, Harviainen & Lieberoth in press, Lehigh 2005, Mackay 2001), and this includes the communities forming around both. Like in sacred rituals, in play the rules of everyday life cease to exist or are cast aside, and actions receive a new meaning from the context of the situation (Huizinga 1984). New interpretations for familiar things and objects are accepted by the participants (Harviainen & Lieberoth in press) and similarly social roles are rearranged regardless of the participants' everyday

roles (Bowman 2010). For example a heterosexual player can play a homosexual character without it being seen as significant in regard to their everyday self (Lehrich 2005).

3. METHOD

The respondents were Finnish role-players, and were mostly assembled using the so-called snowball method. The invitational message containing the URL for the questionnaire was passed to the researcher's social network of players, who in turn forwarded it to their own contacts. Additionally the invitational message was circulated on the mailing lists of various role-playing associations. Due to the need for fairly advanced self-assessment in the questionnaire, the minimum age limit was set at 16 years. The final count of respondents was 16, with 20 different role-playing clubs and societies represented.

It must be observed that the underlying theory poses significant challenges for the researcher. Arnold herself (2005) notes the difficulty of measuring empathic intelligence as a whole. Because of this, the decision was made to construct a survey measuring the respondents' self-assessment of various elements of the theory. While various tested instruments exist for the measurement of individual elements such as empathy, time and resource constraints made their use in the study counterproductive. Just as Arnold with her theory, the author views role-playing as a very complex phenomenon consisting of a multitude of social and mental processes both conscious and unconscious. To focus on only one key aspect was a valid option, but was not the one adopted in this study.

The survey of 71 questions was built around key concepts and themes found in Arnold's theory. These were *community, knowledge and learning, creativity, emotions, empathy and the player character and self-perception*. A cluster of questions was associated with each theme. Additionally the survey collected quantifiable background information on age, sex and hobby experience and provided the respondents with a possibility to describe the positive and negative aspects of role-playing in their own words. Most survey questions were either binary (yes/no) questions, or utilized a five-step Likert scale (two degrees of both disagreement/scarcity and agreement/abundance, one neutral option), suitably worded according to the question at hand. What follows is

an overview of the different themed groups of questions. The survey in its entirety (translated into English) and the data itself are available on request. When appropriate, Cronbach's alpha has been reported.

Group 1: Background consisted of eight questions regarding background variables such as age, sex and education.

Group 2: Role-player identity consisted of five themed questions ($\alpha=.77$) examining the role that role-playing played in the respondent's life.

Group 3: The role-playing community consisted of nine themed questions ($\alpha=.75$) examining the respondent's relationships to other role-players. Cronbach's alpha is for the first six questions, as the three last ones are incompatible due to wording and scale difference.

Group 4: Knowledge and learning effects consisted of seven themed questions ($\alpha=.86$) regarding the respondent's information gathering for role-playing purposes, as well as self-perceived effects on learning.

Group 5: Creativity effects consisted of six themed questions ($\alpha=.70$) regarding art in a role-playing context and vice versa. Due to its nature as a question measuring attitude, question 5.4 was not included when calculating the alpha.

Group 6: Emotional experiences consisted of eight themed questions ($\alpha=.89$) focusing on experiencing strong emotions in role-playing games and processing them.

Group 7: The character and the player consisted of 16 themed questions examining the types of characters the player had played, as well as themes of social roles and empathy. Three of the questions (7.10-7.12) make up an informal subsection in which Cronbach's alpha was .75.

Group 8: Me and others consisted of 10 themed questions ($\alpha=.76$) prompting the respondent to compare themselves to an imaginary non-role-playing contemporary regarding aspects such as creativity and imagination. This section was also contrasted with a control group of 106 non-role-players.

Group 9: Final questions consisted of three open questions regarding the respondent's views on the positive and negative impact of role-playing games on their life as well as the questionnaire itself.

The obtained data was analyzed with the SPSS statistics software, following the advice in several different method guides (Cohen 1988, Gay, Mills & Airasian 2006, Karma & Komulainen 2002). When possible, missing answers were replaced with averages. The effects of gender and differences between the experimental group and the control group were studied using Student's t-test or Pearson's χ^2 -test depending on the question. The effects of age and hobby experience were examined using one-way ANOVA as well as Fisher's LSD-test.

Several method guides (Fowler 1995, Gay, Mills & Airasian 2006, Karma & Komulainen 2002) were utilised in the creation of the survey, and the questions were both submitted to an informal expert- and peer-review at the University of Helsinki Department of Teacher Education. The expert review was provided by Professor Arto Kallioniemi, who also supervised the study. It was also subjected to a test group of five (two non-role-players and three role-players) prior to deployment. Despite this process, several mistakes, such as ambiguous wording on some questions, made their way into the questionnaire. On subsequent informal expert review at the Department of Teacher Education the mistakes were however not considered significant enough to suggest data invalidation. When discussing the results of such questions, the possible ramifications of the researcher's mistakes are taken into account. The fact that the whole of the study was neither validated nor counterbalanced must also be observed when considering its validity and reliability.

4. RESULTS

This chapter showcases what are viewed as the most important results of the study. While some comments and speculation is expressed, most discussion is left to the next chapter. The main findings in each of the nine sections of the survey are reported. In the case of a background variable causing significant change in the results, it is specifically mentioned. The form of the question is either specifically mentioned or apparent from the reporting.

When correlation is discussed in the results, Pearson's correlation is used. It can receive a value between -1 and 1. Here 1 means a perfect positive relationship, -1 a perfect negative relationship and 0 a complete lack of relationship (Karma &

Komulainen 2002). According to Cohen (1988) a correlation between $\pm .10$ and $\pm .29$ indicates a weak dependence, a correlation between $\pm .30$ and $\pm .49$ a medium one and a correlation of over $\pm .50$ a strong one.

Statistical significance as well as correlation strength is indicated in the text by asterisks:

$p < 0,001 = ***$ (statistically very significant)

$p < 0,01 = **$ (statistically significant)

$p < 0,05 = *$ (statistically nearly significant)

Only statistically significant results at the above levels have been reported.

The respondent group ($N=161$) was fairly balanced in terms of gender, with 59% ($N=95$) being male and 41% ($N=66$) being female. Gender differences were significant in various questions, and this is examined in detail later.

Most of the respondents were in their twenties or thirties, with over two thirds ($N=127$, 78,8%) of the respondents over 25 years old. Most ($N=109$, 67,7%) had been playing role-playing games for 11 years or more, and had started playing role-playing games before their 15th year ($N=110$, 69,2%). The level of education was highly biased, with over 75% of the respondents having at least a Bachelor's level degree. This bias was taken into account in reliability studies.

The respondents played role-playing games with various activity, usually a few times per month. A significant amount, 45,3%, played more seldom than once a month. Gender played a significant part ($\chi^2=19,4^{**}$, $df=4$, Cramer's $V=.35$) in allotting roles in the player group: approximately three quarters of the women were always or usually players, whereas this was true of approximately half the men.

Regardless of age or gender, the majority (67,7%) of respondents reported that role-playing games were an important or somewhat important part of their personality ($m=3,7$, $s=1,1$). The role-playing hobby had a somewhat or very important role in the lives of over 80% of the respondents ($m=4,2$, $s=1,0$). Role-players preferred the company of other role-players compared to their other social groups ($m=3,3$, $s=1,0$) and the majority reported that most of their friends were role-players ($m=3,6$, $s=1,2$).

4.1 The Role-playing Community

Over 70% of the respondents viewed themselves as belonging to some extent to an undefined

community or subculture of role-players ($m=3,7$, $s=1,1$). A vast majority of over 87% reported having found significant relationships (no division between romantic and platonic was made) through the hobby ($m=4,4$, $s=0,9$). There was a statistically significant difference between genders ($t=-3,2^{**}$, $df=157$), with women ($m=4,7$, $s=0,6$) reporting having found such relationships markedly more than men ($m=4,3$, $s=1,0$).

Regardless of age or gender, the majority of respondents reported that role-playing games were an important or somewhat important part of their personality.

Of all respondents, approximately 35% completely agreed with the statement that relationships found through role-playing made up a significant part of their social life. If those that somewhat agreed with the statement are included, the percentage rises to approximately 70% ($m=3,8$, $s=1,2$). There was a strong positive correlation ($.64^{**}$) between finding new relationships and the importance of role-playing friends in one's social life.

The role-playing hobby had to some extent provided significant social experiences to 89,4% of all respondents ($m=4,4$, $s=0,8$) and 82,6% viewed the hobby as having had a positive impact on their social development ($m=4,3$, $s=0,8$). Hobby experience played a role, with those respondents that had played for less than seven years reporting less meaningful experiences ($m=4,0$ compared to other groups all with $m>4,5$, $p<0,05$) than other groups. The least experienced group ($m=3,9$, $s=1,0$) reported less positive development than the most experienced one ($m=4,4$, $s=0,8$), with the difference of means significant at the $p<0,05$ level. Regardless of background variables, a majority of respondents reported at least some development in their group skills through the hobby ($m=4,3$, $s=0,8$).

There was a significant positive correlation ($.49^{**}$) between social development and significant experiences. Social development also correlated positively with the importance of role-playing in one's life ($.47^{**}$), finding significant relationships ($.49^{**}$) and improvement of group skills ($.41^{**}$).

All respondents reported meeting their gaming acquaintances outside of gaming situations as well ($m=4,0$, $s=0,9$), with over 73% meeting them often or very often. When meeting these gamers outside of gaming situations, the significance of the role-

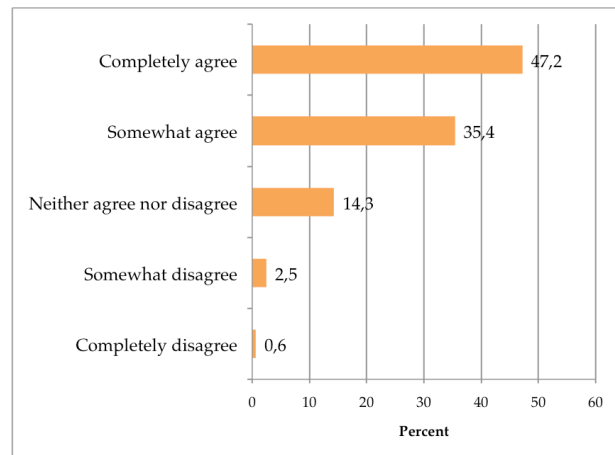


Figure 1. "Role-playing has had a positive impact on my social development". (N=161)

playing hobby in the relationship decreased. Although all respondents talked about role-playing games when meeting gaming friends ($m=3,3$, $s=0,7$), a majority of two-thirds reported talking about them only seldom or occasionally. There was a positive correlation ($.42^{**}$) between this and the importance of the hobby in one's life: the more important the hobby was viewed as, the more it was discussed.

Despite the reported importance of the social aspect of the hobby, game content was still seen as relatively more important than the social gaming situation. Even though the majority (43,5%) of respondents reported these two as being equally important in a role-playing session, there were significant differences in the rest of the spread. Those that viewed game content as being more important than the social situation made up 42,2% of all respondents, while only 14,3% viewed it the other way around. Age had an effect here ($\chi^2=20,7^{**}$, $df=8$, Cramer's $V=.25$), as approximately 62% of 30+ respondents reported game content as more important than the social situation.

Despite the reported importance of the social aspect of the hobby, game content was still seen as relatively more important than the social gaming situation.

4.2 Learning Effects

The themes and events of role-playing scenarios were not contained in the gaming situation itself. Instead, the vast majority (78,3%) of respondents

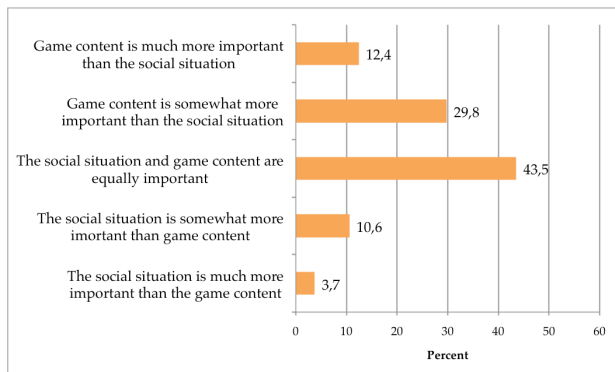


Figure 2. The importance of game content and the social situation in a role-playing game session. (N=161)

reported repeatedly thinking about them outside the games themselves at least occasionally ($m=3,6$, $s=0,9$), with over half of all respondents doing so often. There was a positive correlation ($.48^{**}$) with discussing role-playing games outside gaming situations.

Over 65% of respondents reported having learned new, useful things from role-playing games ($m=3,8$, $s=0,9$) and the majority reported having often or very often sought information on various subjects for game purposes without an explicit request ($m=3,7$, $s=1,1$). Information was also sought inspired by, but independent of game purposes, but to a lesser extent ($m=3,2$, $s=1,0$).

More than half of the respondents estimated that role-playing had improved their problem solving skills ($m=3,5$, $s=1,0$). There was a statistically significant ($t=3,3^{**}$, $df=159$) difference between genders, with men ($m=3,8$, $s=1,0$) reporting it happening more often than women ($m=3,2$, $s=0,9$). Hobby experience was also a significant factor ($F=3,9^{**}$, $df=157$), with those respondents with over 15 years of gaming experience ($m=3,9$, $s=0,9$) reporting improvement more often than other groups with less experience.

4.3 Creativity and Emotional Effects

Regardless of background variables, 57,1% of respondents agreed to some extent with the view that role-playing games are art ($m=3,6$, $s=1,1$). The question included an input box that allowed the respondents to expand on their answer. The following quotes are some of the 79 comments.

Role-playing games are a medium in which it is possible to create art, but they're inherently no more art than any other

creative communal activity. In other words it's a question of definitions. If we're talking about the traditions of art, I might not categorically view role-playing games as art. **Woman, over 30.**

Role-playing and live action role-playing games are a multi-leveled form of culture, combining literary, visual and emotional experience. Role-playing games are the art of experience. **Woman, 25-30.**

I hold the idea that art is performing and experiential – role-playing is participatory rather than performing. Performing art provides outside viewers with a lot, whereas participatory activity is quite bland without actual participation. Role-playing provides experiences, but only if the player partakes in creating those experiences – that's why I wouldn't include it in the performing arts. **Man, over 30.**

Yes, experiences and thoughts are created in role-playing games. But I don't think that the primary intention is to get the people (players?) to think about those things in a new way, but rather to function as entertainment. Even though role-playing games are a way of self-expression for many. **Man, under 25.**

Role-playing and live action role-playing games are a multi-leveled form of culture, combining literary, visual and emotional experience. Role-playing games are the art of experience. (Woman, 25-30)

Over 74% of all respondents reported having experiences similar to those experienced with art when role-playing ($N=158$, $m=4,1$, $s=1,0$), with over 41% reported this happening very often. More than 70% viewed role-playing games as having improved their imagination ($m=3,9$, $s=1,0$). A gender difference was present ($t=2,9^{**}$, $df=123$), with men ($m=4,1$, $s=0,9$) reporting improvement

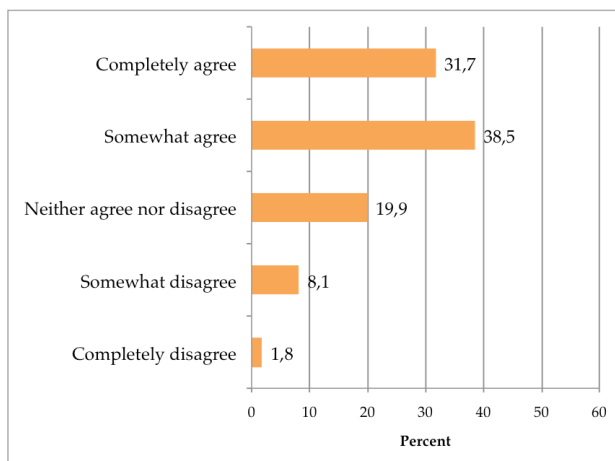


Figure 3. "Role-playing has improved my imagination" (N=161).

more frequently than women ($m=3,6$, $s=1,1$). The question about creativity development yielded similar results, with over 73% of respondents reporting improved creativity ($m=3,9$, $s=1,0$). A similar gender difference was also present, albeit not as significant ($t=2,4^*$, $df=117$). There was a very strong positive correlation ($.79^{**}$) between imagination and creativity development.

In-game events had provided the respondents more frequently with positive ($m=3,6$, $s=0,8$) than negative ($m=3,1$, $s=1,0$) emotional experiences. There was a strong ($.50^{**}$) positive correlation between the two, indicating that the same respondents were inclined to have (or not have) positive and negative emotions from in-game events. Women ($m=3,4$, $s=1,0$) were significantly ($t=-3,4^{**}$, $df=159$) more prone to experiencing negative emotions than men ($m=2,9$, $s=0,9$). No such difference was apparent concerning positive emotions. A similar gender difference, however, was discovered in the frequency with which the emotional experiences caused by in-game events were thought about after games ($m=2,6$, $s=0,9$). This was much more typical for women ($m=2,9$, $s=0,8$) than for men ($m=2,4$, $s=1,0$), with the difference being statistically very significant ($t=-3,8^{***}$, $df=155$). While 16,8% of male respondents ($m=2,4$, $s=1,0$) reported never mentally re-visiting emotional experiences caused by in-game events, every female respondent ($m=2,9$, $s=0,8$) reported doing it at least occasionally. It bears noting that such behaviour was fairly infrequent overall, with 75,2% of all respondents reporting it happening only occasionally or seldom. Introspection brought on

by role-playing was even more rare ($m=2,4$, $s=1,0$), with only 11% of all respondents stating it happening often or very often. Again, women ($m=2,7$, $s=1,0$) reported such introspection more often than men ($m=2,2$, $s=0,9$), with the difference being statistically significant ($t=-2,6^{**}$, $df=159$).

While the majority of respondents replied that role-playing games allowed them to experience negative emotions in a safe environment ($m=3,3$, $s=1,3$), less than half (46%) felt that the games provided a way of dealing with such emotions ($m=3,1$, $s=1,3$). There was a strong ($.76^{**}$) positive correlation present, suggesting that those that viewed the game situation as a safe environment also felt that it helped them process the emotions brought on by games. While lesser than in previous questions, the gender difference was again present ($t=-2,6^*$, $df=159$). Women ($m=3,7$, $s=1,3$) viewed role-playing games as a safe environment for negative emotions more frequently than men ($m=3,2$, $s=1,2$).

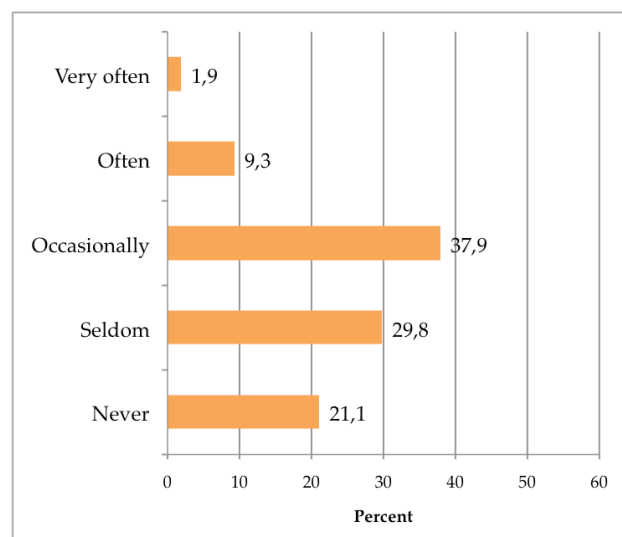


Figure 4. "An in-game event has created an emotional experience intense enough to cause introspection" (N=161).

Exactly 25% of all respondents reported having often or very often been able to examine their own emotional life through role-playing ($m=2,8$, $s=1,1$), while 37,8% said this had happened only seldom or very seldom. As with most previous survey questions dealing with emotional experiences, this was much more common for women ($m=3,2$, $s=1,0$) than for men ($m=2,6$, $s=1,1$). The difference was statistically very significant ($t=-3,6^{***}$, $df=154$). Cross-referencing the correlations between

questions dealing with emotional experiences showed most of them being positively connected.

4.4 The Players and their Characters

The respondents reported having played a wide variety of characters. These are detailed in table 1.

Have played a...	Yes %	No %
Character that bears no physical resemblance to player	91,3	8,7
Character that is of opposite sex to the player	76,4	23,6
Character whose personality is repulsive to the player	78,3	21,7
Character whose personality the player aspires to	82	18
Character that bears no mental resemblance to player	80,7	19,3
Character that bears no social resemblance to player	85,7	14,3
Character whose world view is significantly different from the player's	91,9	8,1
Character that bears no moral resemblance to player	86,3	13,7

Table 1. Character and player differences (N=161).

Gender affected the answers only in the first question, with nearly all men (96,8%) having played a physically very different character compared to 83,3% of the women. The difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2=9,0^{**}$, $df=1$, Cramer's $V=.24$). Hobby experience was a significant ($\chi^2=13,1^{**}$, $df=3$, Cramer's $V=.29$) factor concerning playing repulsive characters. Whereas only 55,6% of players with less than seven years of role-playing experience had played such characters, 90,8% of players with more than 15 years of experience had done so. A clear minority of 26,7% usually played characters closely resembling themselves in terms of personality ($m=2,7$, $s=1,1$).

This result was further supported by over 88% of the respondents viewing role-playing games as a good platform for exploring different social roles ($m=4,3$, $s=0,9$) and by over 84% stating the same about personality traits ($m=4,2$, $s=1,0$).

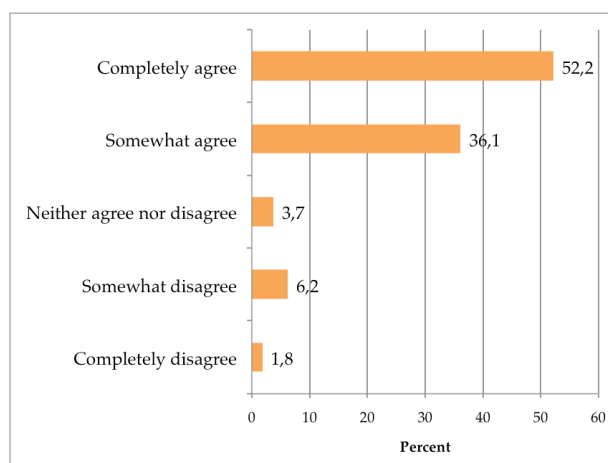


Figure 5. "It is easy to experiment with different social roles in role-playing games" (N=161).

Self-perceived development of empathy skills to some extent was reported by over half the respondents ($m=3,6$, $s=1,1$), and it was slightly more common with men than with women. There were several significant correlations with the perceived development of empathy skills. The most important were with the development of group skills (.48**), art-like experiences (.44**) and the processing of negative emotions through role-playing (.45**). There was a medium negative correlation (-.37**) between empathy development and playing characters similar to oneself. The more the players reported playing characters differing from themselves, the more they reported a feeling of having developed their empathy skills. A little over a third of respondents reported often or very often comparing their own actions with those of their characters ($m=3,2$, $s=0,9$).

4.5 Compared to Others

The eighth section of the study consisted of a series of self-assessment questions, in which the respondents compared themselves to an imaginary non-role-playing contemporary on a five-step Likert scale. The respondents were asked to rate themselves in the following areas: imagination, interest in the world and its phenomena, social skills, group skills, problem solving skills, empathy, creativity, tendency for introspection, interest in culture and finally spare time reading activity. Explanations for the terms and concepts were included where deemed necessary, and the

wording on the Likert scale altered according to each question.

To alleviate some of the problems inherent in self-assessment questionnaires (Dunning, Heath & Suls 2004, Sundström 2005) a control group (N=119) was used. The control group was drawn from four different student choirs in the University of Helsinki and the survey was conducted in a similar way to the experimental group. The control group members were made aware of participating in a study examining the self-perception of different hobby groups, and they were allowed to select from a variety of hobbies they actively participated in. One of these options was role-playing, thus allowing the screening and removal of active role-players (N=13) from the sample, resulting in a total of 106 valid respondents in the control group.

There were considerable differences in background variables between the two groups. The most significant one was gender: the experimental group consisted of 59% males and 41% females, whereas in the control group 21% were male and 79% female. The control group had a larger percentage of under 25 year olds than the experimental group (38,7% compared to 21,1%) and correspondingly a smaller amount of over 30 year olds (16,0% compared to 33,5%). In both groups a majority of exactly 45,3% fell into the 25-30 age category. Due to the control group consisting of student choir members, 90,6% of the respondents possessed at least a Bachelor's level degree, compared to 75,8% in the experimental group.

In the experimental group age and hobby experience accounted for some minor differences ($p < .05^*$) in the respondents regarding interest in the world. Role-players in the 25-30 age category ($m=4,0$, $s=0,8$) rated themselves higher than those under 25 years old ($m=3,6$, $s=0,7$). The same held true for those respondents with over 15 years of gaming experience ($m=4,0$, $s=0,8$) and those with less than 7 ($m=3,6$, $s=0,6$). The age effect was not found in the control group.

Level of education did not significantly affect responses in the experimental group. On the whole the same held true in the control group, although Fisher's LSD test revealed those respondents with at least a Master's degree ($m=4,0$, $s=0,8$) viewing themselves as more introspective ($p=.03^*$) than those with a Bachelor level degree ($m=3,6$, $s=0,9$).

No statistically significant gender difference could be discerned in the experimental group, the only

notable difference being females ($m=4,1$, $s=0,8$) viewing themselves as more creative ($t=-2,3^*$, $df=159$) than males ($m=3,8$, $s=0,7$). In the control group there were more significant gender differences with males viewing themselves as more interested in the world ($t=2,9^{**}$, $df=104$) as well as more skilled in problem solving ($t=2,3^*$, $df=104$).

As a general rule respondents in both groups mostly rated themselves average or above average in all the areas. Role-players ($m=4,3$, $s=0,7$) viewed themselves as having a much richer imagination ($t=-4,7^{***}$, $df=265$) than non-role-players ($m=3,9$, $s=0,8$). Spare time reading activity was much higher ($t=-5,5^{***}$, $df=265$) in role-players ($m=3,8$, $s=1,0$) than in the control group ($m=3,2$, $s=1,0$). There was a weak ($.25^{**}$) positive correlation between imagination and reading activity.

Role-players viewed themselves as having a much richer imagination than non-role-players.

A third statistically significant difference was found in the respondents' views of their social skills. Non-role-players ($m=3,6$, $s=0,8$) had a higher view of their social skills ($t=2,8^{**}$, $df=265$) than role-players ($m=3,3$, $s=0,9$).

4.6 In Their Own Words

The final section of the study consisted of two open questions, one asking the respondent to assess the positive impact of the role-playing hobby on their own life and one the negative. The first question garnered 121 answers, and the second one 80. Below are listed the most commonly mentioned aspects along with some actual quotes.

Positive impacts

By far the most common positive aspect mentioned was the effect of the hobby on interpersonal relations, such as new friendships and wider social circles. This was mentioned in 77 different answers.

When I met my first role-playing contemporaries at the age of 16, I felt as if I'd come home. The same people are still active in my life. **Woman, 25-30.**

If I consider the fact that every significant relationship since preliminary school is connected to the role-playing hobby, including the one with my household partner, I'd say the effect is immeasurable. **Woman, over 30.**

Improvement of social skills was explicitly mentioned 23 times. Four respondents specifically reported overcoming social difficulties.

Meeting nice people. Safely experimenting with social roles. Larping increased my courage. **Woman, under 25.**

18 respondents reported development of empathy, the skill of taking another's point of view or assuming another role.

I've taught myself to relate to other people by attempting to see life from different points of view. I think it's because of this that I'm not completely obnoxious today. **Man, over 30.**

A lot. My skill in examining things from different points of view has increased, as has the ability to consciously assume a certain status or role and through that capabilities in affecting other people. For example overcoming feelings of insecurity in a job interview by distancing oneself from one's own self and insecurities. **Man, over 30.**

Meeting nice people. Safely experimenting with social roles. Larping increased my courage.
(Woman, under 25).

Identity-building, mental development and increased self-awareness were mentioned 17 times.

I think I'd be stuck in many ways with myself, if I hadn't found the right channel to unleash all that inner energy. The role-playing circles and other like-minded people helped overcome wounds caused by bullying. Finding one's own place has reinforced the feeling of self as well as the feeling of being good at something. **Woman, 25-30.**

The effects of role-playing on imagination, creativity and self-expression were specified in 13 answers.

Role-playing games have offered a suitable and voluntary arena for different creative projects, which would have otherwise remained hidden. This has had a big positive effect on me as a person. It has been much better to play and develop role-

playing games than it would've been to write for years for the drawer or take part in more institutionalized cultural activities (amateur theatre etc.) **Man, 25-30.**

There were various other themes mentioned, such as escape from reality, improved improvisational skills, relaxation and having fun, improvement of language skills and general knowledge.

Negative impacts

The most commonly mentioned negative effect was time consumption, which was brought up 29 times.

It just eats up time something awful. I've often skipped school work to write role-playing games. **Man, 25-30.**

I could play the Devil's advocate and say that I spend too much time with them compared to my other social activities / maybe everything else. **Man, under 25.**

The second most common negative aspect was stigmatization and the need to explain the hobby to non-gamers. This was mentioned 18 times.

Not all people can understand the concept of role-playing, but instead joke about going out wearing a cape made out of a sheet. I no longer bring up the hobby in my first conversations. **Man, under 25.**

Bullying had already started before gaming, but as the (live action role-playing) hobby became public knowledge, it just added fuel to the flames. **Man, over 30.**

The close-knit, elitist nature of the role-playing community was criticized in 16 answers.

The communality and "scene" qualities in role-playing include phenomena which I consider negative on some level. For example in role-playing games the escapist way of dealing with problems isn't about the fictional world but rather the self-regulated community separate from "mundanes" [non-role-players], where people escape the problems they don't have the capacity deal with in a more mundane community. Because of this role-playing games often become unnecessarily important and serious: they're laden with social investment which it might be wiser to use in more everyday circles. **Man, 25-30.**

Role-playing is a very inwards turned hobby – what I mean is that they don't promote looking outwards. I think you can see in many role-players a tendency for focusing intensely only on one's own role-playing culture. **Man, over 30.**

Seven of the respondents mentioned the blurring or avoidance of reality or the bleeding of negative feelings from games into everyday life.

In my most intensive role-playing periods I've at times been so immersed in the lives of characters and the game world that it has begun to impede so-called normal life (studies, relationships etc.). At times it has even been difficult to make the distinction between the self and the characters played – in this way it can be thought that role-playing has even been an impairment in my younger years – when I was still looking for myself and my identity.

Woman, 25-30.

The respondents also brought up loss of money, inappropriate behaviour by other players as well as the strain put on friendships by games.

5. DISCUSSION

Several things have to be considered when viewing the results of the study. While an online survey is a quick method of gathering a large sample, it may also result in quick, non-thoughtful answers by the respondent. Possible misunderstandings are also very difficult to control, as there is no way for the respondent to ask for definitions or more information, nor for the researcher to make further questions. The survey included several large concepts such as empathy, problem solving and group skills, and while explanations for the terms were provided, there still exists a variety of interpretations.

The method of sampling provides another problem, that of generalization. While the snowball method guaranteed the participation of plenty of active, long-time hobbyists certainly capable of analyzing their relationship to role-playing games, it also severely limits the results in terms of generalization. The lack of generalizability does not, however, preclude the study from providing insight into the phenomenon researched or from providing ground for future research.

A third risk lies with the respondents themselves. The researcher never knows whether the answers given are honest or biased, and it is reasonable to assume that some respondents may second-guess the reasons of the study and provide socially desirable, “correct” answers. This is not seen as a significant problem, however, as the study is more an exploratory survey of attitudes and views than an attempt to for example build an accurate, generalized image of a typical role-player. For the same reason suggesting direct causality in the results has been avoided in favour of correlation scores and speculation.

Both theory and the results of the survey suggest a connection between the role-playing hobby and empathic intelligence as defined by Arnold. According to the results, there is a significant overlap of the actions and communities described in Arnold's theory and those self-perceived by the respondents. Narratives, empathy, engagement and both inter- and intra-subjective activity came up as integral parts of role-playing, with respondents widely reporting increased group skills and positive social and mental development in line with what Arnold suggests empathically intelligent conduct should produce. These findings combined with previous research (Bowman 2010, Karwowski & Koszynski 2008, Piippo 2010, Simkins & Steinkuehler 2008) suggest that role-playing games provide tools and a suitable environment for developing positive interaction and group skills – both important elements of empathic intelligence.

Self-perceived empathy skill development was apparent in the results, with over half of all respondents viewing role-playing as directly having increased their empathy skills in some quantity. The positive connection between role-play and empathy development has been observed in previous research (Poorman 2002), supporting this result. Imagination and creativity that Arnold lists as being key factors in empathy were both perceived having developed via role-playing by over 70% of the respondents. The respondent group had typically played characters significantly different from their everyday selves in terms of personality, world view, morals or gender. Over a half of the respondents avoided playing characters similar to themselves. Instead, the games served as a platform for exploring social roles and personality traits. This is very much in line with Simkins & Steinkuehler (2008, 352) who state that

RPGs [role-playing games], even violent games with dark and transgressive themes such as vampires and assassins, provide us simulated social spaces in which we can play through various ways of being in the world. It may very well be that playing through such roles, including those we would never consider taking up in the real world, has the potential not only to foster greater empathy, tolerance, and understanding for others but to help us critically reflect on who we want to be for others and how we have both power and responsibility in all of the roles we inhabit in our lives.

In-game events were a common source of both positive and negative intense emotions, further suggesting the importance of the games to the players. It is possible to deduct from these answers that role-playing games provide a space for what Arnold mentions as perhaps the most important aspect of narratives and the imagination: a deeper understanding of the world via crossing the borders of everyday life. However, a significant difference in emotional investment in games exists. Some respondents were consistently more often emotionally touched by games than others, with this being especially prevalent in women.

The results also show a perceived connection between role-playing and art, suggesting legitimization for utilizing the tools of art studies and art philosophy in the study of role-playing games, as well as viewing role-playing as at least something similar to art in relation to Arnold's theory especially regarding emotional experiences. From this it is suggested that the potential for reflection that Arnold sees in art is also present in role-playing games. Emotional experiences elicited by role-playing were at least occasionally mentally re-visited to by more than half of all subjects, and over 60% reported being at least occasionally able to examine their own emotions through role-playing. Albeit in various quantities, meaningful experiences as described by Arnold and Harding (2007) seem to appear in role-playing games. This result finds support from Henriksen (2006) who explicitly views role-playing games as having potential as a reflectional tool. There is an interesting connection here with the research carried out by Kross, Ayduk & Mischel (2005), in which it was found that a self-distanced perspective was key to processing and coolly reflecting on negative emotions, whereas an

immersed self-perspective increased the risk of enhancing distress. According to the results of the current study, reflection does not automatically or inevitably follow role-playing, however, and that true introspection brought on by games seems to be a fairly rare occurrence.

Some respondents were consistently more often emotionally touched by games than others, with this being especially prevalent in women.

The study shows communality to be an important part of the role-playing hobby. Similar results have been found in previous studies (e.g. Fine 1983, Leppälahti 2002, Piippo 2010). The respondents identified themselves as role-players quite readily, and the role-playing community was brought up in the open questions repeatedly, in both positive and negative comments. This suggests that the role-playing community as described by the respondents matches Arnold's concept of a community providing life with meaning and eliciting both rational and emotional attachment and commitment. The negative comments speak of such commitment as well. The negative aspects of the role-playing community has been previously noted for example by Fine (1983), Lehigh (2005) and Kim (2010), who report findings similar to those voiced by the respondents in the current study.

The results of the study combined with existing theories suggest a potentially strong connection between empathy development and the role-playing hobby. The elements of empathy that Arnold lists – reflection, community, imagination and role-taking – are shown to be present, and the position is supported by the open answers explicitly mentioning empathy and imagination development. Based on this study role-playing games have the potential to further the empathy development of practitioners. Just as with the potential for reflection, it bears to keep in mind that empathy skills are not a direct result of role-playing, but rather that the hobby seems to provide a rich environment for its healthy and effective development. Again, this corresponds with previous writings and research. Poorman's study (2002) showed empathy development as a result of role-playing, the role-players interviewed by Piippo (2010) brought up empathy development as

the most positive effect of role-playing, and for example Harder (2007) and Pitkänen (2008) have both noted role-playing's potential for teaching empathy and social skills. Simkins & Steinkuehler (2008) state that role-playing games are potentially powerful spaces for practicing and developing skills of critical ethical reasoning, another important element of empathy development. There are of course several difficulties that go with stating a connection between self-perceived empathy development and role-playing. There are various definitions for empathy and previous research is often conflicting (Stepien & Baernstein 2006). This is in addition to the unreliability of self-assessment especially in the case of large abstract concepts (Dunning, Heath & Suls 2004).

The results also suggest that based on existing theory and the self-assessment of active role-players, the role-playing hobby provides a good platform for developing empathic intelligence as described by Roslyn Arnold. Due to the difficulties of measuring empathic intelligence as a whole, the claim is based on finding in both theories and respondent views on role-playing the majority of the qualities seen by Arnold as essential to empathic intelligence and its development. This conclusion is reached despite taking into account criticisms that can be levelled at individual aspects of the study such as survey construction or the validity of self-assessment, although these should be taken into account and addressed when designing and conducting further research.

The study also sheds light on the self-perception of role-players as well as their overall view of the hobby. The hobby's dual aspects of game content and social event both show their importance. The social networks growing around the hobby are seen as a very important part of role-playing, yet in an individual gaming session the stressed importance of game content becomes apparent. This seems to suggest large variations in the way role-playing games are viewed. For one group the games are first and foremost about the content, for a smaller group it is the social event that matters more. For the majority it is a combination of the two. No background variable clearly accounting for the differing preferences was found. One possible explanation and a variable not explored in this study is whether a respondent usually plays tabletop or live action games. The social dynamics in a typical tabletop gaming group of 3-5 players differ significantly from those of a live action game with tens or even hundreds of participants, which

might account at least in part for the preferability of either game content or the game's social function.

The whole of the hobby is viewed in a very positive light. This is supported by the respondents' tendency to view themselves as belonging to a sub-culture or community of role-players, even if almost half the respondents reported playing role-playing games only once per month or less. The positive view extends to the players themselves as well. Contrary to common stereotypes (Curran 2010, Leppälahti 2002) role-players appear to have a very positive self-image, viewing themselves as creative, empathic, and imaginative. This is consistent with Curran's (2010) findings when reviewing past research. There are several problems with self-assessment, though, and its accuracy has been called into question with conflicting results (Dunning, Heath & Suls 2004, Sundström 2005). However, even if role-players do overestimate their social and mental skills, it is in itself an indication of an overall positive self-image, which in turn they largely seem to attribute to their hobby. Whether this positive self-image is realistic is an entirely different question that calls for further research. When examined against the data provided by the control group, significant differences did emerge. Role-players viewed themselves as much more imaginative than their control group peers. They also showed a strong reading hobby. The fairly low correlation between the two suggests that reading a lot does not directly imply a rich imagination.

However, even if role-players do overestimate their social and mental skills, it is in itself an indication of an overall positive self-image, which in turn they largely seem to attribute to their hobby

Positive results of using role-playing as a vehicle of creativity and imagination development exist (Karwowski & Soszynski 2008) and the imagination of role-players calls for further studying. While role-players generally viewed themselves as having normal or better than average social skills, there was a notable difference in the low-end assessments when compared to the control group. Whether this indicates individuals with poor social skills taking up role-playing, non-

existent social skills being developed to a better (if still low) level or the hobby distancing some role-players from everyday social functioning is another question to study. It is apparent, however, that the stereotype of role-players lacking social skills (Bowman 2010, Leppälahti 2002) is not completely fictional.

As a tertiary finding there were notable gender differences, especially in regard to emotional responses brought on by role-playing. Women reported in-game events causing negative emotions more often than men, a result in line with previous research (Simon & Nath 2004) showing women to report negative feelings more frequently than men. Women also reported more frequently dealing with their negative feelings in a safe environment provided by role-playing games. It was also much more common for women to report reflecting on game events and their emotions, and processing the latter through games.

6. CONCLUSION

There is strong indication of role-playing games potentially having a positive effect on the development of both intra- and intersubjective skills, based on empirical research, theory and personal experience. Yet potential does not equal actual development. If there is a wish to use role-playing games as a tool for social, mental or emotional development, it will require careful planning and delicate use of the tool. Role-playing has been used in teaching and different forms of therapy, and its potential in cultivating skills necessary for community building and improving social conduct is obvious.

This study also indicates that role-players take their hobby seriously. Games are often not just games, but also important social events and mental pressure valves. This study is hopefully one among many others working to dissolve the claim of games being “just games” and establish gaming in its many forms as an important form of culture. When role-playing games are viewed in this context, the importance of further research on the role-playing experience and its possible effects on players, both positive and negative (for example Meriläinen 2011, Montola 2010), becomes apparent.

There is clearly an abundance of aspects to role-playing that require much more research – the community, the gender differences, the game

experience and role-players' self image to mention a few. One aim of this study was to serve as a platform and an opening, providing new findings and in turn provoke new questions, which it did despite its shortcomings. As role-playing research becomes more systematic and widespread, more actual research data hopefully enters a field still largely influenced by personal opinions and informed assumptions and eventually a solid research tradition develops.

Games are often not just games, but also important social events and mental pressure valves.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Drs. Arto Kallioniemi and Erkki Komulainen for their assistance during the research process, as well as my thesis advisor Dr. Markku Hannula.

8. REFERENCES

- (1) Allan, G. 1989. *Friendship: developing a sociological perspective*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- (2) Arnold, R. 2004. Empathic intelligence: the phenomenon of intersubjective engagement. In: AARE (Australian Association for Research in Education) International Education Research Conference. Melbourne, Australia Nov 29 – Dec 2 2004. <http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/arn04242.pdf> (retrieved 27.10.2011)
- (3) Arnold, R. 2005. *Empathic intelligence*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- (4) Bettelheim, B. 1991. *The uses of enchantment – the meaning and importance of fairy tales*. England: Clays Ltd, St Ives plc. Originally published 1976.
- (5) Bowman, S.L. 2010. *The functions of role-playing games*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc.
- (6) Choy, E. 2004. Tilting at windmills – the theatricality of role-playing games. In: Montola, M. & Stenros, J., eds. *Beyond Role and Play – tools, toys and theory for harnessing the imagination*. Helsinki: Solmukohta 2004.

- (7) Cohen, J. 1988. *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences (2nd edition)*. New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- (8) Curran, N. 2010. Stereotypes and Individual Differences. *International Journal of Role-Playing*, 2, 44-58.
- (9) Dunning, D., Heath, C. & Suls, J. 2004. Flawed self-assessment – implications for health, education and the workplace. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 5(3), pp. 69-106.
- (10) Eisenberg, N. & Strayer, J. 1987. Critical issues in the study of empathy. In: Eisenberg, N. & Strayer, J., eds. *Empathy and its development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (11) Fine, G.A. 1983. *Shared Fantasy. Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- (12) Flood, K. 2006. The theatre connection. In: Fritzson, T. & Wrigstad, T., eds. *Role, Play, Art – Collected experiences of role-playing*. Stockholm: Föreningen Knutpunkt.
- (13) Fowler, F.J. 1995. *Improving survey questions – design and evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- (14) Gardner, H. 1983. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.
- (15) Gay, L.R, Mills, G.E & Airasian, P. 2006. *Educational research – competencies for analysis and applications*. 8th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- (16) Goffman, E. 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor books.
- (17) Harder, S. 2007. Confessions of a schoolteacher: experiences with role-playing in education. In: Donnis, J., Gade, M. & Thorup, L., eds. *Lifelike*. Copenhagen: Projektgruppen KP07, Landforeningen for Levende Rollespil.
- (18) Harding, T. 2007. Immersion revisited: role-playing as interpretation and narrative. In: Donnis, J., Gade, M. & Thorup, L., eds. *Lifelike*. Copenhagen: Projektgruppen KP07, Landforeningen for Levende Rollespil.
- (19) Harviainen, J. T. 2010. Live-Rollenspiel als Kunstform – Eine kurze Einführung. In: Dombrowski, K., ed. *Larp: Einblicke. Aufsatzsammlung zum MittelPunkt 2010*. Braunschweig: Zauberfeder.
- (20) Harviainen, J. T. & Lieberoth, A. (in press). Similarity of Social Information Processes in Games and Rituals: Magical Interfaces. *Simulation & Gaming OnlineFirst*, doi 10.1177 / 1046878110392703
- (21) Heliö, S. 2004. Role-playing: a narrative experience and a mindset. In: Montola, M. & Stenros, J., eds. *Beyond Role and Play – tools, toys and theory for harnessing the imagination*. Helsinki: Solmukohta 2004.
- (22) Henriksen, T.D. 2004. On the transmutation of educational role-play – a critical reframing to the role-play in order to meet the educational demands. In: Montola, M. & Stenros, J., eds. *Beyond Role and Play – tools, toys and theory for harnessing the imagination*. Helsinki: Solmukohta 2004.
- (23) Henriksen, T.D. 2006. Games and creativity learning. In: Fritzson, T. & Wrigstad, T., eds. *Role, Play, Art – Collected experiences of role-playing*. Stockholm: Föreningen Knutpunkt.
- (24) Holter, M. 2007. Stop saying "immersion"! In: Donnis, J., Gade, M. & Thorup, L., eds. *Lifelike*. Copenhagen: Projektgruppen KP07, Landforeningen for Levende Rollespil.
- (25) Hopeametsä, H. 2008. 24 hours in a bomb shelter: player, character and immersion in Ground Zero. In: Montola, M. & Stenros, J., eds. *Playground worlds – creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*. Helsinki: Gummerus.
- (26) Huizinga, J. 1984. *Leikkivä ihminen*. Translated by S. Salomaa. Third edition. Juva: WSOY. Originally published 1938.
- (27) Hyltoft, M. 2008. The role-players' school: Østerskov Efterskole. In: Montola, M. & Stenros, J., eds. *Playground worlds – creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*. Helsinki: Gummerus.
- (28) Jenkins, H. 2005. Games, the new lively art. <http://web.mit.edu/cms/People/henry3/GamesNewLively.html> (retrieved 5.8.2011)
- (29) Johnson, R.B. & Onwuegbuzie, A.J. 2004. Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come. *Educational Researcher* 33(7), pp. 14-26.
- (30) Karma, K. & Komulainen, E. 2002. *Tilastollisen kuvauksen perusteet käyttäytymistieteissä*.

<http://www.helsinki.fi/kti/julkaisut/tkpk/index.htm> (retrieved 3.8.2011)

- (31) Karwowski, M. & Soszynski, M. 2008. How to develop creative imagination? Assumptions, aims and effectiveness of Role Play Training in Creativity (RPTC). *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 3(2), pp. 163-171.
- (32) Kim, J. 2004. Immersive story – a view of role-played drama. In: Montola, M. & Stenros, J., eds. *Beyond Role and Play – tools, toys and theory for harnessing the imagination*. Helsinki: Solmukohta 2004.
- (33) Kim, J. 2010. Culture and social status in larping. In: Larsson, E., ed. *Playing reality*. Stockholm: Interacting Arts.
- (34) Lappi, A-P. 2007. Playing beyond facts: immersion as transformation of everydayness. In: Donnis, J., Gade, M. & Thorup, L., eds. *Lifelike*. Copenhagen: Projektgruppen KP07, Landforeningen for Levende Rollespil.
- (35) Lehrich, C. 2005. Ritual discourse in role-playing games. http://www.indie-rgs.com/articles/ritual_discourse_in_RPGs.html (retrieved 1.8.2011)
- (36) Lehrskov, U. 2007. My name is Jimbo the orc. In: Donnis, J., Gade, M. & Thorup, L., eds. *Lifelike*. Copenhagen: Projektgruppen KP07, Landforeningen for Levende Rollespil.
- (37) Leiber, I. 1995. Pedagoginen draama hoitoalan koulutuksessa. In: Lehtonen, J. & Lintunen, J., eds. *Draama. Elämys. Kokemus. - Kirjoituksia ilmaisukasvatuksen alalta II*. University of Jyväskylä.
- (38) Leppälähti, M. 2002. *Peli on elämää – etnografiaa roolipelaamisesta*. Licentiate thesis. University of Turku.
- (39) Lieberoth, A. 2006. With Role-Playing in Mind — A Cognitive Account of Decoupled Reality, Identity and Experience. In: Fritzon, T. & Wrigstad, T., eds. *Role, Play, Art – Collected experiences of role-playing*. Stockholm: Föreningen Knutpunkt.
- (40) Mackay, D. 2001. *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game. A New Performing Art*. Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc.
- (41) Meriläinen, M. 2011. It's not just fun and games. In: Castellani, A. & Harviainen, J.T., eds. *Larp Frescos. Affreschi antichi e moderni sui giochi di ruolo dal vivo*. Firenze: Larp Symposium.
- (42) Montola, M. 2008. The invisible rules of role-playing. The social framework of role-playing process. *International Journal of Role-Playing* 1, pp. 22-34.
- (43) Montola, M. 2010. The positive negative experience in extreme role-playing. http://www.nordic-digra.org/nordicdigra2010_submission_16.pdf (retrieved 1.8.2011)
- (44) Müller, M. 2011. From subculture to mainstream. In: Henriksen, T.D. et al., eds. *Think Larp – academic writings from KP2011*. Copenhagen: Rollespilakademiet.
- (45) Pettersson, J. 2005. *Roolipelimanifesti*. Helsinki: Like.
- (46) Piippo, A-M. 2010. *Etnografia pohjoissuomalaisista roolipelaajista 2009-2010 – harrastajayhteisö, peli-rituaali ja moniulotteinen pelikokemus*. Master's thesis. University of Oulu.
- (47) Pitkänen, J. 2008. *Pedagoginen roolipelaaminen historian opetusmetodina*. Master's thesis. University of Helsinki.
- (48) Poorman, P. 2002. Biography and role playing: fostering empathy in abnormal psychology. *Teaching of Psychology* 29(1), pp. 32-36.
- (49) Rogers, C. 1975. Empathic: an unappreciated way of being. *The Counseling Psychologist* 5, pp. 2-10.
- (50) Simkins, D. & Steinkuehler, C. 2008. Critical ethical reasoning and role-play. *Games and Culture*, 3(3), pp. 333-355.
- (51) Simon, R. & Nath, L. 2004. Gender and emotion in the United States: do men and women differ in self-reports of feelings and expressive behavior? *American Journal of Sociology*, 109(5), pp. 1137-1176.
- (52) Smuts, A. 2005. Are video games art? *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 3.
- (53) Stenros, J. 2010. Nordic larp as theatre, art and gaming. In: Montola, M. & Stenros, J., eds. *Nordic larp*. Stockholm: Fäa Livia.

- (54) Stepien, K & Baernstein, A. 2006. Educating for empathy – a review. *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 21(5), pp. 524-530.
- (55) Sundström, A. 2005. *Self-assessment of knowledge and abilities – a literature study*. University of Umeå Educational Measurement publication 54.
- (56) Talib, M-T. 2002. Voiko tunteita opettaa? In: Kansanen, P. & Uusikylä, K. , eds. *Luovuutta, motivaatiota, tunteita – Opetuksen tutkimuksen uusia suuntia*. Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus.
- (57) Toivanen, T. (in press). Taidekasvatusta vai opetusmenetelmä – pohdintoja draaman opetuksen perusteista ja suhteesta teatteritaiteeseen. In: Kallioniemi, A. & Virta, A., eds. *Ainedidaktiikka tiedonalana ja tutkimuskohteena*. To be published in 2012.

Mikko Meriläinen holds an MA in Education. He's currently a doctoral student at the University of Helsinki and is doing NGO work in the Pelitaito project, which aims to reduce problematic excessive digital gaming and gambling among children and teenagers.

Call For Papers

The International Journal of Role-Playing (IJRP) is now accepting submissions for the upcoming issues. Deadline for submissions for the next issue is April 1st, 2013.

The International Journal of Role-Playing invites researchers, designers, developers, academics, artists and others involved in the growing field of research related to role-playing to submit articles. The IJRP is a peer-reviewed journal, and welcomes submissions from any sphere of interest, knowledge network, research field or de-development sector that directly or indirectly relates to role-playing interests.

Potential topics include but are certainly not limited to the following:

- Role-playing games, e.g. frameworks, storytelling and graphics; art, design and creative industry
- Role-playing culture, psychology, media, economics, and sociology
- Role-playing technology, surveys, vocabulary, training and education
- Other aspects of role-playing and related research and development

The International Journal of Role-Playing is a biannual international journal that covers all aspects of role-playing, irrespective of the medium, platform or intent. The IJRP specifically aims to act as the focal point, for pushing the limits of role-playing knowledge, and to improve sharing of knowledge across the knowledge networks involved with role-playing- and related work, notably the industry, the academia and the arts. The journal will encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences, and will be a free, online forum where knowledge can be harvested. In realizing that the knowledge networks involved with role-playing- and related work are based in a variety of interest spheres, which write and publish their work in different ways, the IJRP will accommodate the knowledge sharing principles of the various networks.

The International Journal of Role-Playing is an innovative, novel platform for knowledge sharing that reaches across traditional fields, and will treat submissions from **academia, industry** and **creative** forces on an equal basis through a joint publication framework, which is specifically designed to accommodate contributions from all of these diverse sources.

Submission Deadline

April 1st 2013

All submissions will be peer reviewed by three members of the multi-disciplinary editorial boards, who represent the diverse interests of the knowledge networks involved in role-playing and related work, e.g. academia, industry and the arts. All submissions will be reviewed by experts from the knowledge network of the submission, together with at least one reviewer from a different network. Through this and other initiatives, the IJRP aims to assist authors in promoting cross-network aspects of their work.

The International Journal of Role-Playing is an online publication backed up by on-demand printing. The IJRP aims to have all papers go through their initial review within three months of receipt. Manuscripts should be submitted electronically, following the instructions on the IJRP website: www.journalofroleplaying.org, which also contains important dates and deadlines.

The IJRP specifically aims at providing authors with a higher than usual degree of freedom in composing their manuscripts and expressing ideas. Consult the journal website for more information.